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Love Stories of the American Girl

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"You'll marry us and marry us now!"

Bride of the Desert

At the point of a gun she said: "I will!" Was her hatred of this ravisher of girlish dreams strong enough to bring retribution upon him?

By Madeleine Sharps Buchanan

Author of "The Love Beads," etc.

CAROL HASTINGS rose from her seat and peered from the window of the swiftly moving train. Very soon, she thought, she would be in the arms of her lover, Graham Foster. She had been engaged to him for three years, and when her father's death left her unexpectedly alone in the world, he had written to her, telling her to come to him at once.

Graham had made good out in the desert country. His letters had described his big ranch and his valuable herd of steers. Carol had always felt that he would succeed, even when he left the East and every one predicted that that was the end of him; and now he was to marry her as soon as the train arrived at Bonalto.

The very name of the place was al-

luring. The train rushing toward it through the white desert moonlight could not move fast enough for the lovely, eager girl who sat gazing curiously from the window, with her suitcase at her feet and a thousand dollars and two diamond rings—all that she possessed in the world—in a suède bag against her racing heart.

Memories of her lover kept popping up in her excited brain. They had met at a college dance. She had instantly liked his jolly laugh, his good nature, his big, sturdy build. Her family had approved when she announced that she was to marry him.

Then he had told her that he had been offered a big chance in the West. She had approved his wish to go out there and rough it and make good. Now, contrary to the predictions of her father and her friends, Graham had made a place for himself, and had been able to send for her when, but for him, she would have had to look for a position in some business office.

"Bonalto!" yelled the conductor, opening the car door and letting in a gust of hot desert air.

As Carol started from the train, she felt hot and cold by turns. Would Graham kiss her? Of course he would. Had he changed? Why, in no time at all she would be his wife! She remembered his caresses, and a delicious flush tinted her exquisite little face.

The conductor touched her arm.

"Bonalto isn't just the place to put off a young lady at midnight," he said anxiously. "Mighty lonely! Anybody meeting you?"

Carol glanced from the little station to a few straggling lights that dotted the near-by scene.

"Why, yes, my future husband is to meet me," she dimpled.

"Oh, that's different!" smiled the conductor. "My very best wishes, miss. Hope you'll like it out here."

The train crept away, its red tail light winking at Carol mockingly as she stood on the platform looking after it.

Graham was not there. There was no one there. Apparently she and that great white moon had the world to themselves; but what a world! The heart of romance, a setting for a dream!

Sounds of music came from a distance, and, cutting through it sharply, the sound of a horse's feet. In the still air noise carried far. A panicky feeling crept over Carol. Why had

not Graham met her? Suppose he did not come at all?

As she turned to enter the station, she looked down the street that straggled through what there was of the town, and eventually crawled, through the glorious moonlight, up a slight rise and vanished. Nothing moved on that street, or anywhere. The vague music still kept up. A door slammed somewhere, and there was the faint lilt of a girl's soprano. Beside Carol the steel rails along which she had come reached away to worlds of which she knew nothing.

SUDDENLY, out into the moonlight that lay so whitely on the little platform, sauntered the figure of a young man. He wore leather leggings, a wide leather belt that sagged upon his slender hips, a flannel shirt that was slightly open at his brown throat, and a dusty sombrero set rakishly on the side of his handsome head.

Carol watched his approach with a wild sort of panic. He walked unsteadily, yet with a graceful swagger that was probably natural to him. When quite close to her, he swept the sombrero from his head and bowed to her.

"I've come to meet Miss Hastings," he announced.

Carol shrank from him.

"Mr. Foster was to meet me here," she replied coldly.

"It will be many a day before Graham Foster meets you or any one else," said the young gentleman politely. "He was going to marry you to-night, wasn't he?"

"Why, yes!" Carol was gripped with a cold horror. "Oh, what has happened to him?"

"Plenty," nodded the strange young man. "Just now there's a posse out looking for your bridegroom, Miss Hastings. Most regrettable, but true."

"*What* is looking for Graham?" gasped Carol.

"A posse—a bunch of men. They'll hang him if they get him."

Carol swayed against the wall of the unpainted little station. Her lovely face had lost every vestige of its usual delicate color. Her wide, dark eyes clung to the nonchalant countenance of the young stranger.

"You see," he condescended to explain, "Graham has been rustling cattle. Had a fine gang of men with him, but the sheriff got most of them. Rustling is stealing. It sounds kind of ancient, but it still goes on. You were all set for a wedding, weren't you?" He looked at her frightened face with a boyish grin. "Reckon Graham made everything ready for you. He had a license and a minister all waiting. I hate to have you disappointed, away out here all by yourself. You just come along, and *I'll* marry you!"

"Please go away from me," replied Carol, speaking very low. "You don't know what you are saying. You are not yourself."

"Not Cal Ward?" he smiled. "I never was more so. Do you see that little light across the street yonder? That's where the minister is waiting for Graham and you. He's a poor sort of minister—kind of sickly, and afraid of his shadow; but he can tie the knot, all right. You come over with me, and we'll get married; and he won't be disappointed, and neither will you."

Carol was both frightened and puzzled. It seemed like a musical comedy. From somewhere the appropriately dressed chorus should now come prancing forth. Could anything be wilder or handsomer than this young

man? Was he crazy, or had he been drinking, or *what* ailed him? What on earth was she to do? She felt actually sick when she thought of Graham.

"I don't believe you," she declared, tight-lipped.

With a quick gesture the man took Carol's shrinking arm and swung her about to face a placard that ornamented the station wall just behind her. Graham Foster's good-looking face stared at her, with the dread words printed beneath it that a reward was offered for the capture of this notorious cattle rustler!

"OH, how could he?" moaned Carol, gazing at the notice as if hypnotized. "What am I to do?"

"Marry me," said the drawling young voice beside her. "Why, of course you'll marry me! That's the only answer."

"Are you mad?" cried the girl, regarding Cal Ward with flashing eyes. "I shall scream for help if you don't go away this moment!"

The young man smilingly tapped the pistol that she saw, with widening eyes, hanging at his broad belt.

"If you do scream, there's nobody in this fool town who will come near my gun," he said with splendid indifference. "Somebody has got to take care of you out here. You don't know this country. Come along, and you'll be Mrs. Ward before the moon gets beyond that bunch of mesquite yonder. It slides behind it every night."

As he spoke, the young man lifted Carol's suitcase. She thought rapidly. There was no one about. She could not stay on the station platform all night. The thought of the minister cheered her. He would help her. She would go with this handsome young lunatic, and would appeal to him. She was soul-sick, anyhow, after that shock about Graham.

On the porch of the minister's little frame house, Cal Ward turned to Carol and met her panic-stricken eyes with his own audacious ones. A smile, dangerously fascinating, tugged at his lips.

"Of course you know plumb well I wouldn't be doing this if I hadn't fallen dead in love with you the minute I saw you," he told her bluntly. "Never been that way before. You're just my girl!"

Carol did not reply. She could not. Inside the lighted room before her she had glimpsed a man in clerical garb; but the minister proved a sad disappointment. Small and pallid, and in obvious fear of Ward, he listened in silence to the young man's short explanation, amazing as it was. Not a glance did he give Carol, who stood close to him, regarding him with eyes that were starry with contempt.

"But I—you know, Cal, that I can't perform this crazy ceremony," he faltered. "The license—why, it wouldn't be right. I—"

"I say you are to marry us, and marry us you will," said Ward, with ominous quiet. "You know me. Have you ever heard anything against me?"

"No, no!" said the little minister nervously. "But to-night you're not yourself. Something has happened to you. I never saw you like this. I cannot—"

"I know what I'm doing," insisted Ward obstinately. "Hurry up and marry us, Hildreth!"

"I would sooner wed with Graham Foster, a known cattle thief, than with an intoxicated stranger!" declared Carol clearly. "You can never force me to marry you. You are mad!"

Ward shifted his gun until it was trained full upon the minister. He held it at his hip—which, although Carol did not know it, proved him the most dangerous type of shot.

"I'm not in a mood to be played with," he said quietly.

The minister turned upon the defiant Carol. His eyes shrank from her direct and contemptuous gaze.

"Young lady, you do not know this country," he said in a voice that trembled. "There is no one in Bonalto, or near it, who would stand up against Cal Ward. I don't know what ails him to-night. It is true that he is a man of good character, is well thought of, and has a large property. Moreover, this marriage can be set aside later. Just now we can do little but humor him."

Carol knew real fear then. She looked from that tall, boyish figure to the puny form of the minister, and there seemed to be no help anywhere in that strange moonlit world. Shaking and unnerved by the discovery of the real character of the man whom she had traveled so far to wed, the girl was desperate. Married at the point of the gun!

Turning to Cal Ward, she held his reckless eyes with her own angry ones.

"What will you do with that gun, if I refuse to go through with this ridiculous farce?" she demanded.

"I won't harm you, of course," said Ward politely; "but in the case of your refusing to marry me, Miss Hastings, I shall puncture the right arm, and possibly the left, of our worthy friend Hildreth here. You wouldn't like that. It would worry you, because, you see, you would have been responsible!"

Carol turned to the minister. "Is there no one you can call?"

"He will do nothing," said Ward softly, "save what I ask. It is my earnest desire, Miss Hastings, to wed you. I love you, and you are going to love me. Foster played you a mighty low trick when he failed to meet you. It sure did get me, a delicate little lady like you getting off that train alone at midnight, and no one to take care of you! And the news that was waiting for you! I didn't have the idea of marrying you myself until I saw you—I'll tell you that; but somebody had to meet you. Any chap would know that!"

As he spoke, he swayed a little, and laid his hand on a table behind him. Carol watched him keenly. She could not decide just what was wrong with the young man, but evidently there was something.

"I beg you do as he says," said the minister earnestly, to Carol. "We can have it set aside. Cal is not himself to-night, and we must humor him."

Carol glanced about the room helplessly. She was miserable and frightened, and, under it all, desperately angry. She was terrified by the handsome young savage with the gun. Moreover, what did it matter to her now? Such a ceremony could never hold!

"Put up your gun," she said haughtily, to Ward. "I will marry you, to save this poor idiot of a minister from being shot to pieces by a crazy cowboy. I will marry you, but Heaven help you if you try to keep me to it! It is the maddest thing I ever heard of!"

IT was over. Cal Ward made no effort to kiss his bride, but flung the trembling minister a roll of bills. Then he turned gravely to Carol, and

for a moment held her desperate eyes with the straight gaze of his.

"You are mine," he said clearly and firmly, "and no power in heaven or earth shall ever take you from me."

Then an astounding thing happened. Having made his gay challenge, Cal Ward swayed for a moment, stooped to lay his hand on his left knee, and, with a grimace of pain, fell prone among the pillows of the couch near the door.

As he did so, a young man in dusty riding clothes strode into the room.

"Have you seen Cal?" he demanded of the minister. "We are worried to death about him. He—oh, by George, what has happened to him?"

The newcomer knelt beside Ward and laid his hand on the senseless man's brown cheek, while in faltering tones the minister, still holding his roll of bills, explained what Cal had done.

Carol walked to the window, where she stood looking out at the horse upon which the stranger had evidently ridden, as, with bridle flung over its head, it nibbled the grass. The young man came over to her, his face red with embarrassment, his hat in his hand.

"I can explain to you, miss," he said eagerly. "I'm Jerry Banes, and I owe it to Cal, seeing he's down and out like this. This afternoon he got a snake bite out on the desert, and we had to fill him with bad whisky, or he would have died. Most of the stuff here is bad, and as a rule Cal doesn't touch it. He's the straightest lad in this country, and that's why he got so upset about Foster not being able to meet you. Well, we never knew when he left us to ride into town, and I reckon he'll wake up to-morrow plumb ignorant about everything he did to-night. You needn't worry, Miss Hastings. He won't even look at a girl."

Carol glanced at the long, boyish figure stretched upon the couch, and vaguely she began to understand.

"You see, we all talked a lot about this girl coming from the East and not knowing about Foster and all," Jerry went on nervously. "I guess Cal got up in a kind of delirium, and went to meet you; and then you—well, in his state, you know, you kind of bowled him over."

He grinned at Carol in comradely fashion. He could understand Cal, if no one else could. A girl like Carol on the station platform in the white desert moonlight!

"Miss—er—Hastings can go to the hotel for the night," suggested the little minister quaveringly. "To-morrow, perhaps, Mrs. Howe would have a room for her. She put up the last school-teacher."

"Yes," said Carol, turning to Jerry Banes. "Please show me where the hotel is, for I'm deadly weary; but tell me first whether this terrible story about Graham is true."

"It sure is," said Banes gently. "You had a lucky escape, miss. Just you forget you ever knew him; and don't worry about Cal. He's a first-rate fellow."

CAROL woke in a small white-washed room where the sunshine lay in golden patches. For a moment she did not know where she was. Then memories of the night before rushed upon her, and she grew sick and faint. Why, she was married! She had been wed to a handsome, reckless boy who had held a minister at the point of his gun and had not known what he was doing! He had been bitten by a snake and filled full of something that he never otherwise touched—to save his life.

Who ever heard of such a strange situation? What should she do?

One golden patch of sunlight lay upon the heavy seal ring which Cal Ward had forced upon her reluctant finger the night before, and which she had flung upon the bureau when she retired. The sight of it filled her with fear and repugnance.

And then came the memory of Graham Foster. With tears blinding her eyes, Carol sobbed into her pillow for a long time. Thoughts of armed men hunting her former lover across the desert haunted her.

The sun grew hotter in the little white room. A horse clattered past. Somewhere somebody was washing dishes.

Carol could stand it no longer. She rose and stood before the window.

There were board walks in Bonalto, and simple, unpretentious houses. A grocery store and a drug store were within her line of vision farther down the street. Beyond, like the rim of a saucer, the desert, a pale amethyst world, hemmed in the little town.

Carol performed her simple toilet and smoothed her golden head, for she was one of the fairest things to look upon—a dark-eyed blonde. Then, making sure that her suède bag was against her heart, she left her room in search of breakfast.

No one was about save a slender girl in a red apron, who was removing dishes in the long dining room. She stood still and stared when Carol appeared at the door.

"I came last night," said Carol with a smile. "I am Miss Hastings, and I should like some breakfast."

"Sure!" replied the girl. "Just sit down anywhere."

Carol sat down and glanced at the long, bare room. Every one in Bonalto, save herself, had apparently long since gone about the day's work.

When the girl brought her ham and eggs and coffee, she asked a question.

"Have they found Graham Foster yet?"

"No!" The girl tossed her head. "They won't find him in a hurry. They'll hunt a while, and then they'll come trailing in. Then there'll be another stealing, and they'll go out again. Some day they'll get him. They always get 'em sooner or later. It don't pay to be crooked. Did you come to take the new school, miss?"

"Is there a position vacant?" inquired Carol, looking up quickly.

"Yes, we got a new school in Bonalto now," nodded the girl. "This is a growing town. The Creeping Creek mine did it."

"How could I ask about that?" asked Carol.

"Go to Mr. Todd. He has charge of everything that goes on in this town," smiled the girl. "See that office over there? Dick Todd—he's a lawyer."

A lawyer! Carol flushed. A lawyer was just the person she must talk to about her wild midnight marriage!

She rose, hesitated, came back, and laid her hand on the girl's arm.

"Tell me," she whispered, "what sort of person is Cal Ward?"

"Cal?" A rose flush crept over the girl's face. "What makes you ask about *him?*"

"I want to know who and what he is," said Carol firmly, for she saw a strange expression in the girl's eyes.

"He has a ranch away off in the desert country," replied the girl dreamily. "Oh, such a romantic, beautiful ranch! Cows, sheep, alfalfa fields, peach orchards. They say it's a paradise. He comes in to town now

and then, and once in a while he examines a mine for some city men. What do you know about Cal?"

"And who is Jerry Banes?" asked Carol eagerly.

"Oh, he's Cal's right-hand man at the ranch—his foreman, or whatever you want to call him. They're fine boys out there!"

"Oh!" said Carol. "I see. Thank you!"

Leaving the girl, she stepped to the front door and walked across the porch. The sooner she saw the lawyer, the better; but she was not destined to see him just then, for as she reached the steps a lithe young figure flung itself from the back of a horse that was moving at what looked like breakneck speed, and approached Carol, doffing his sombrero.

"Good morning, Mrs. Ward!" said a familiar drawling voice.

"I suppose," replied Carol, after one terrible paralyzed moment, during which she took in the astounding picturesqueness and audacious good looks of her bridegroom, "that we must have a chat. Mr. Banes explained a little to me last night."

"You cannot know this desert country, the power of the sun, the danger of a snake bite, the deadliness of the cure the men used on me," grinned Cal boyishly. "I reckon, however, it saved my life, and I sure like my life!"

WITHOUT a word, Carol led the way into the little parlor of the hotel. It was an empty room where a few flies buzzed; but as Cal Ward strode into it with his insolent swagger, and swung out a chair for his bride to sit upon, romance seemed to take possession of the place, and a daring atmosphere of youth and courage grew within it.

Cal sat upon a chair with his arms folded on the back of it and his audacious eyes full upon her.

"Hope you'll believe me when I say I don't remember a thing I did last night," he said gravely. "It's a blank to me. Only Jerry's word, and poor old Hildreth's — the minister, you know—do I have for the sins it seemed I committed. I'm mighty sorry for the whole thing."

But he looked anything but sorry, sitting there with his eyes laughing at her!

"I'm afraid you'll never believe me until you know the desert," he told her gently. "As I said, I'm mighty sorry. I apologize."

Carol felt the idiotic outrage of the thing as she looked at the flash of his white teeth against his brown, lean face.

"You do not look sorry or ashamed," she said sharply. "And what are we to do about it? We are married, unless that man is no minister."

"I assure you he is," said Cal gently. "He's that, and nothing more. I can assure you, too, that had I been myself I would never have picked Percy Hildreth to marry me."

"But just what do you expect to do about it?" asked Carol. "You say you are sorry, but you laugh at me, and you do not suggest any way out. How do you expect me to regard you, Mr. Ward?"

"With both your lovely eyes, from now on forever, I hope." Ward bowed over his folded arms. "As far as I am concerned, the knot old Hildreth tied last night will stay tied; and anybody within a few hundred miles will tell you that I never change my mind or break my word. Of course, you can start something, considering that we

had no license and no witnesses, and that I was—as I was; but I shall fight you, and this is my country, not yours!"

Carol rose, horror growing in the lovely eyes he had spoken of.

"Do you mean to say you're going to hold me to—this thing?" she demanded.

"I shall do my best to keep you, no matter how I got you," replied Cal, his mouth taking on grim lines.

"I see!" said Carol slowly, the color ebbing from her lovely face. "So that is the sort of man you are!"

"I'm afraid I am," agreed Cal sadly. "Foster talked a good deal about you, and we know you have no money and no people; and this is not the place for a girl who is fixed like that. Out beyond this town I have a ranch—rather a nice ranch, with people who serve me and love me. I offer it to you as your permanent home. I'm ready to take care of you, and believe me, you need it! We are both alone in the world. Why not try me? You'll love me, Carol, soon—out on my desert ranch!"

His voice fell caressingly.

"How can you suggest such a thing?" cried Carol in horror. "We are utter strangers!"

"That's why I don't want you to send me out of your life so quickly," pleaded Cal. "I got off to a mighty bad start, but give me a chance. Let's know each other better."

"I am going to ask for the new school," said Carol coldly. "If I do not get it, I shall go farther West; but before I go this outrageous marriage must be set aside!"

"You heard what I said," replied Cal evenly. "I always lay my cards on the table. You shall not go out of my life, because I love you. You must give me a chance to make you love me. If I have that chance and fail, then you may go; but now—no!"

He got to his feet with lazy grace.

"You will get no help from me in your effort to annul our marriage," he said gravely. "My home is yours, and I intend to see that you accept it!"

Carol went daringly close to him and lifted her angry face defiantly to his. She quivered with rage and helplessness.

"I hate you!" she breathed. "I don't believe a word you have told me about the sun and the snake bite and the stuff they saved your life with! I never shall! It is fantastic, absurd! You must be utterly mad to think—"

But Cal Ward's strong young arms shot out and swung about her, and the rest of her sentence was lost in the crush of his eager lips on hers.

DICK TODD looked approvingly at the slight young lady before him. He was a young man who was almost too handsome to be all that he should be. His dark, lustrous eyes met Carol's with a lazy admiration that flushed her cheeks.

"I think I can get you the school," he told her. "Everybody here knows your romantic and interesting story, and we are kind-hearted people. We are holding a meeting to-morrow night, and I can let you know at the end of the week. I'll do all I can to help you."

"I somehow felt sure you would," replied Carol demurely.

"As for this other matter—this absurd and lawless marriage—it can be set aside." Todd flushed angrily. "You are no more Ward's wife than I am!"

"The man who married us was a minister," argued Carol.

"But you were married at the point of a gun, without witnesses," returned Todd sharply. "The law can take care of things like that!"

"I should hope so," said Carol haughtily. "I am not at all afraid of Mr. Ward."

"You may well be, nevertheless," Todd warned her. "It would not be unlike him to steal you outright; and once he had you at his ranch, I don't know what any of us could do. He's surrounded there by men who adore him."

Carol grew pale, and her dark eyes widened with fear.

"Do you really think he would dare do *that?*" she breathed. "Surely not!"

Todd smiled grimly as he nodded.

"He would dare anything. I wish it was Cal Ward the posse was after, and not Foster!"

"You hate him," said Carol, sensing that he was jealous of Cal.

"Yes, and more so since I have learned what he did to you." Todd bent forward with passion in his eyes. "I am going to free you from him!"

"You'll love me —if I have to keep you here till your golden hair turns gray!"

TWO days later, as Carol and Todd rode a little way into the desert country, the lawyer told her that she was the mistress of the new school.

"The whole town is for you, strong," he said, leaning toward her from his saddle. "Foster treated you shamefully, and we feel very sorry for you. Mrs. Rankin or Mrs. Howe will give you a room."

Carol, looking like an exquisite boy in her riding clothes—the suit she had worn back in the East—turned grateful eyes upon Todd.

"I shall never forget that you were my friend," she said softly; "but every one has been kind to me. Despite my dreadful adventure the night I came here, I find I love this little town!"

As she spoke, her eyes wandered out

to the golden desert before them—wastes of glittering sand that lay folded hotly against a bronze-blue sky. Its immense emptiness appalled her. Out there the tireless posse hunted the man whom she had come so far to wed, and in some favored and fertile spot flowered the ranch her husband offered her as a home!

"I hope," said Todd softly, "that you will soon love more than this little town, Carol!"

The girl started from her dream and flushed. Her delicate face registered all her passing emotions. The man watched her devouringly.

"I am not free to love anything," she replied bitterly.

"I shall have that arranged for you very shortly," declared Todd, his face darkening.

"Answer me one thing," said Carol earnestly. "No matter how wild it was, no matter how irregular—at present I am married to Cal Ward, am I not?"

"Why—"

"Answer me!" snapped Carol.

"I suppose you would be considered so," admitted Todd grudgingly; "but, of course—"

"I know all that," said Carol; "but at present I am his wife, am I not?"

"I—I'm afraid so."

Carol drew a long, quivering breath and stared up at the burning sky, where a few buzzards circled.

"In a few days you will be—" began Todd eagerly.

"I know. It's to-day I am concerned with. I cannot sleep at night for thinking of it!"

After a long moment, while their horses walked side by side, Carol spoke again.

"Any news of Graham?"

"No; but you are well rid of him." Todd shook his head. "Much as I hate Cal Ward for my own reasons, he is a good fellow, and bears a good name. I admit against my will that I expect he will deal honorably with this situation."

"I think more highly of you for it," smiled Carol.

THE summer evening was romantic in Bonalto. When darkness came the sky seemed to bend very low, and from its velvet arc the moon shone in glory. Carol, sitting on the step of her new home—the house of the kindly Mrs. Howe, who had boarded the last school-teacher—enjoyed the beauty of the heavens. There was life about her, too. Music sounded in snatches. There were radios in the little town, and motor cars that sped swiftly. From the distance came the eerie whistle of a train.

Bending her head suddenly, Carol burst into tears, a helpless melancholy settling down upon her.

"I'm sorry," drawled a voice close beside her. "Can I do anything about it?"

With an angry start she lifted her head, to meet Cal Ward's smiling gaze. The young man was lounging against a near-by pillar, with an unlighted cigarette in his fingers. In his riding clothes, with a gay handkerchief knotted at his throat and his big hat crushed under one arm, he was a fitting caller for a lovely girl to have on such a night.

"I hear you have the new school," he went on pleasantly. "Some of Todd's arranging, no doubt."

Carol rose. Her lovely little head was lifted high, and she looked directly into his eyes.

"Go away," she said distinctly. "I have nothing to say to you."

"Pardon me," replied Ward evenly, "but we have much to say to each other. I don't blame you for feeling as you do. You are a girl of spirit and sound common sense, and that is why I love you. I cannot let you go, Carol; and since the law won't let me do as I wish about it, I must act."

"I shall never believe that you didn't know what you were doing on that station platform," declared Carol, trembling with rage. "You were cool, sane, and deliberate. I don't believe the story of the rattler's bite on the desert, the sun, and the drinks you took. You married me against my will and you kissed me against my will. I hate you, and I'll never have another thing to say to you so long as we both live!"

"And that is why I must do what I am about to do," said Cal softly. "Moreover, I know such men as Todd and Foster, and I know you by now. Nothing shall ever harm you, and you have nothing to fear from me; but I don't propose to lose my bride. As long as you stay here I haven't a chance with you."

Carol never knew how it happened. Suddenly, from behind her, something heavy and warm was flung over her head, and two powerful arms lifted her. All her struggles were in vain, and after a few anguished moments, filled with panic, she fainted, much to her disgust.

SHE woke to find herself riding easily, cradled in Cal Ward's arms, on the back of a slowly moving horse, headed across a seemingly endless desert through that unearthly moonlight.

On and on paced the horse, and as she came out of her daze she discerned figures riding ahead, at an even and leisurely pace. It all seemed like a dream, and the sands disturbed by the horses' feet were like little mounds and drifts of silver.

They must have been traveling for some time, because far ahead there loomed a mountain, its bands of piñon, oak, and juniper rising spectrally against that uncanny moon. Somewhere the call of a coyote sounded weirdly.

Carol was powerless against the iron arms that held her. Her revolt against Cal Ward must not be physical, Carol thought. Only by loathing and contempt could she show him how she felt.

"You are taking me to your ranch?" she asked quietly.

"To *our* ranch, Carol!"

She shivered a little, staring across the sands. Who would believe she had not gone willingly into the desert with her daring bridegroom? What could she do? If she got away, where could she go? The morning would come, with its burning, death-dealing sun. She would wander off beneath it and—die.

Cal Ward's ranch was evidently a long distance from town, for after a time the horses were halted and preparations were made for camping. Cal lifted his prisoner to her feet, where she swayed for a moment, ere she sank to the ground and covered her face with her hands. Soft, gayly colored blankets were spread for her close beside a little spring, and Cal motioned her toward them.

"We have a long trip to-morrow, and we shall not reach my ranch before supper time," he told her gently. "Rest, if you can. I've made everything as comfortable as possible for you."

Carol lifted her furious little face.

"What do you expect to gain by this?" she panted. "Oh, I hate you!"

"I'm sorry," said Cal, "but this was my only chance with you. I saw that."

She was left alone then. They were on high ground, and the air was chill. It seemed impossible after the hot moonlight on the sands below, but Carol was glad to wrap herself in the warm blankets. The men—two of them besides Ward himself—cared for the horses and built a fire.

Carol's thoughts were with Graham Foster, hunted through that very same desolate country. Perhaps he was even then crouching beside some fire, just as she was.

She woke at dawn. A burning blue sky spread itself above her, although she lay in the shade beside the spring. The men were stirring, and the dreadful adventure of the night before rushed back upon her.

Was there ever such a honeymoon? For it was that. Much as she hated Cal, he was her husband. She could not walk away and leave him, as if that insane midnight marriage had never been.

A smell of bacon and coffee began to tease Carol. Desert and sky were melted together in the glory of the risen sun. Cal Ward and his romantic, tremendous country had taken her and rendered her helpless; but she would go on fighting!

As she ate the delicious breakfast—brook trout and bacon, coffee and toast—there was only weary disgust in the girl's beautiful face. Soon afterward the little party was again in the saddle, and Carol's journey to the home of her desert bridegroom was resumed.

Not a word did she speak during the long hours of the weary ride; but the young men, one of whom was Jerry Banes, chatted and sang together. Cal did not thrust his society upon her, but he treated her courteously and saw always to her comfort.

IT was toward sunset, as they were nearing the ranch, that the second halt that day was called to rest the girl. The horses stopped in a shaded glade where juniper and pine grew thickly, and Carol walked to one side and sank upon the pile of blankets that Cal flung down for her.

Lying upon her back, with one arm over her eyes, giving way to her deathly fatigue, while the men lounged and smoked and chatted some distance away, she was presently roused by a low breathed "Hist!" close beside her.

Looking cautiously under her arm, her eyes became fixed upon a break in the close growth near by. She was looking into the eyes of Graham Foster.

"What are you doing out here?" asked the grim lips of the man whom she had come so far to wed.

A new sort of rage flooded over Carol. Hitherto she had had no time to be angry with Foster and herself. She had only had pity for herself and him. Now, suddenly, she was speechlessly furious.

"What are you doing here with Cal Ward?" whispered the almost motionless lips.

"I am his wife," replied Carol simply.

A dazed rage flashed into the unshaven face before her.

"*What?*" snapped Foster.

"How dare you speak to me?" breathed the girl, with flashing eyes. "You, a cattle thief, hunted, wanted by the law! With only a word I could give you up to be hanged!"

"But you were always a good

sport," said Foster. "I am coming to Ward's ranch to-night at ten o'clock. You must see me. You must help me. I need it desperately!"

"I also need help," said Carol quietly. "I'll see you to-night, if you come; but go now."

"You still love me!" whispered Foster, his eyes shining triumphantly. "I shall hope that—"

Carol motioned him away sharply. A moment later, when Cal Ward flung her a glance, she was sitting in a despondent attitude, staring vacantly.

In her heart a miracle had happened. She knew now that she had nothing but disgust and contempt for Graham Foster. The eager, romantic girl who had traveled so many miles to wed him, who had sprung so unafraid from the train at Bonalto at midnight, seemed to have died. The present Carol was another person.

Shortly after twilight they reached Cal Ward's domain. Carol looked about her with frank interest as the weary horses descended a gradual slope to the valley where the ranch lands lay spread before them in the unearthly moonlight. Huge cottonwoods gave shade and a pleasant touch of coolness to the picture. To the left of a clump of white buildings lay a thrifty-looking peach orchard. The fragrance of a wide reach of alfalfa fields came pungently to the tired girl as she rode forward, the trail running along an irrigating ditch fringed with willow trees. Flowering vines completely covered the long, low ranch house that came to view as they followed a curve of the road.

Carol caught her breath at the loveliness of the place. Terror swept her, too. Would she ever again leave this beautiful spot? She was its owner's wife. What would he do with her?

Ward turned his flashing smile upon her.

"Welcome to your home, Carol!" he drawled. "Isn't it romantic enough to tempt any girl?"

"This is not the lawless West of frontier days," said Carol quietly. "You cannot keep me here!"

"Until you love me, I shall," said the man as quietly.

CAROL was waited upon in a dainty room and bath by an Indian woman who seemed to guess her every wish.

"Long time ago," her attendant told the girl, with a smile, "Cal Ward have sister. She pretty, like you. Heap sick long while. When she die, he no have anybody touch her things. Give 'em to me just now for you. You heap pretty, like her!"

Carol took the dainty garments with a sense of awe. The Indian woman was serving her as if she was mistress of the desert ranch.

"I will give you money—I will give you this, if you will help me to get away from here!" she told the woman desperately, taking her amber beads from her throat.

The woman shook her head.

"Cal Ward big chief. Plenty good master. Everybody love him. Nobody here help White Rose to run away!"

There was something doggedly final in the woman's words, and Carol accepted it. She flung herself across the dainty bed in a passion of tears.

A tray of delicious food was brought to her later, and she made no pretense of not eating it. She was young and healthy and hungry.

After the meal she went to the balcony and stood looking into the moonlight. A boyish laugh reached her

from the direction of the bunk house, where a light burned. Somewhere a banjo twanged. A tenor voice sang fragments of a song; and far away a coyote called.

While Carol stood there, Cal Ward left the bunk house and swung into the saddle of a horse that stood not far from the balcony. His movements were swift and graceful, and the girl looked after him with reluctant admiration. He was gone—her jailer bridegroom was gone; and her wrist watch told her that it was almost ten o'clock.

With her soul shrinking from the coming interview, Carol stole through the spacious house to the garden. There the night was a curiously luminous lavender, and the scent of alfalfa came to her again hauntingly. She had scarcely reached a row of tall cottonwood trees near the house when a whisper startled her.

"Carol! I am here!"

Foster's arms closed about her suddenly, and she saw his lips bending to her face. With both small hands she beat him from her.

"How dare you touch me?" she gasped. "You, a thief, despised by every law abiding man in the country! You let me come alone at midnight to this unknown country to marry you, and you didn't even meet me! You were even then being hunted by a posse!"

"Well," said Foster grimly, "I'll admit I'm a rustler; but I have a place, miles from here, where they'll never find me. It's a fine place, and I'll take you there with me; but first I have to eat, and I want another suit of clothes. I'm in rags, and about starved. I've got to have water, too. I'm not asking you for a horse, for I've got a dandy; but you must help me with these other things, Carol!"

Carol shrank from him, her lovely face filled with anger and distress.

"I am Cal Ward's wife," she said simply. "How can I help a man whom my husband would give over to the law?"

"Your husband!" sneered Foster. "That was quick work! But I can take that up with you later, Carol. You were mine before you ever heard of him. Are you going to help me?"

"Why should I help you when you cannot help me?" asked Carol bitterly. "What chance would I have in the desert with you? That would sign your death warrant indeed!"

"But you want to get away from here?" he inquired, looking at her keenly.

"I—"

As Carol started to speak, she glanced behind her at the loveliness of the ranch gardens, and into her mind flashed the picture of Cal Ward swinging into the saddle. He was a hero for any girl to love; but she could not forget that he had married her at the point of a pistol, against her will, and that he had forcibly carried her off into the desert.

"YES," said Carol sadly, "I want to get away, but not with you. The law courts will have to release me."

"Where I'll take you there is no law," whispered Foster. "I love you—I adore you! It was torture to know that your train was arriving at Bonalto that night, and that I dared not meet you!"

"You let me come that long journey," she said scornfully, "and I got off the train to see your face staring at me from a placard on the station wall! Now wait here, and I will get you something to eat."

Carol stole toward the rear of the ranch house. While the Chinese cook was in the pantry, she took a platter of cold chicken from the top of the refrigerator and snatched up half a loaf of bread. To this, as she fled, she added a little pail of water that stood by the outer door.

Watching Foster eat and drink like a ravenous wolf, the girl's delicate lips curled with disgust. How could she ever have given this rough fellow a thought? What had the West done to him—the West which produced such romantic, colorful figures as Cal Ward on his desert ranch?

Foster talked to her rapidly as he filled his water bag with the contents of the pail she had brought.

"Now get me a suit of Ward's clothes. The bunk house is yonder, and all the men are there. You can work it. I know where the horses are, and I can lasso one for you. Come with me now, Carol!"

"No, no!" shuddered Carol. "I cannot think to-night. If I do go with you, Graham, it will only be so that you may show me the trail to Bonalto. No one here would do that."

"Well, all right!" A crafty look stole over the man's face. "I've got to lay low for a time, anyhow, to rest up. Will you be here this same hour to-morrow night?"

"Yes," said Carol desperately. "I'll bring you food, if I can. Go, now. Don't let them take you here, Graham!"

Evading his eager arms, she ran back to the dark kitchen and replaced the platter on the refrigerator. In her own room once more, she lay on the bed and stared into the moonlit dusk, her nerves quivering.

The worst had happened now that Graham had crossed her path. Loathing him as she did, she could not give him up to the law. Besides, he was the only man who could or would show her the road back to Bonalto. If only she could reach Dick Todd! She did not trust Foster, but in her desperation she thought she might take the risk of pitting her wits against his.

On the following day Carol ate breakfast and luncheon on her balcony. The Indian woman served her adoringly, and, despite her misery, she found the food delicious and the desert air exhilarating. Cal Ward's love for her could not have been set in a more romantic frame; but she could not forget that the yellow menace of the trackless desert hemmed her in.

TOWARD sunset a man on a weary horse rode down the sloping approach to the ranch and dismounted before the porch. Carol's eyes widened with delight when she saw that it was Todd. The next moment she was out of her hammock and flying down the stairs, her hands held out in welcome.

"Dick Todd!" she cried, her breath catching with the unexpected joy of seeing him.

"I thought I should find you here, Carol," he said gravely, taking her hands. "No one knew what had become of you, but Cal Ward was seen in town that night with a couple of his boys."

"He stole me!" cried Carol, her cheeks burning with anger. "I cannot get away; but you must make him see reason. You must free me, somehow!"

"You will go back with me," Todd told her. "You haven't suspected the lengths to which this man will go. On the day when he kidnaped you he received a telegram for you, and I'll

wager he never showed it to you. Am I right?"

"I have had no telegram," said Carol. "There is no one who would be likely to telegraph me."

"You told me there was a lawyer—the man who settled your father's estate."

"Why, yes—Mr. Phelps."

"Exactly! He telegraphed you that a distant relative had died, leaving you a hundred thousand dollars. A letter was to follow at once. Ward got the telegram, because he was in the station when it came, and he said he would deliver it to you. The night he brought you here he knew he brought a girl who was worth a hundred thousand dollars!"

"He knew when he brought me?" breathed Carol. "I cannot believe that. I had no relative worth so much money."

Todd shrugged.

"I only tell you what the telegram contained."

"How did you know?"

"Chap in the station told me. The whole town is up in arms about you."

"What are you doing here, Todd?" asked Ward's drawling voice at this moment, and Cal himself sauntered out of the house.

"I rode out to learn what you had done with Miss Hastings," snapped Todd; "and to bring her some news which no doubt you withheld—the telegram about her inheriting a hundred thousand dollars."

"Mrs. Ward belongs in her husband's home," said Cal, lighting a cigarette. "I don't know that her being here is any one's business. I don't know anything about a telegram."

Carol took a step toward Cal and looked up into his smiling eyes, her little hands clenched.

"Did you receive a telegram for me the day you brought me here?" she demanded.

"I did not," replied Ward pleasantly.

"Of course he denies it," shrugged Todd.

"Just what's your game now, Todd?" asked Cal, turning suddenly upon the lawyer. "If you have thought up some way to turn my bride against me, you have had your trouble for nothing. She hates me now about as much as she ever can, but you're not going to take her from me, nor is any other man!"

Carol looked miserably toward the group of cottonwood trees. Her thoughts were with the wretched Foster, hunted by the tireless posse. She could get nothing from Cal's inscrutable brown face, and she did not know what to believe.

With a hopeless gesture of contempt she turned from both men and ran into the house.

She was halfway up the stairs when Cal Ward followed her, laying his firm hand upon hers on the broad balustrade.

"You are willing to believe any one against me," he said tensely. "You have not believed me from the first. You are afraid of your life that you'll love me, Carol, and love me you shall!"

He sprang up the short flight before she could do more than run to the landing; and there he caught her and held her, laughingly, his handsome young face bent to hers.

"Carol, Carol, you are going to love me if I keep you in my desert home until your golden hair is gray!" he said.

Despite her struggles, he laid his lips on hers and held her there, while

her very heart, for all that she could do to control it, thrilled to his caress.

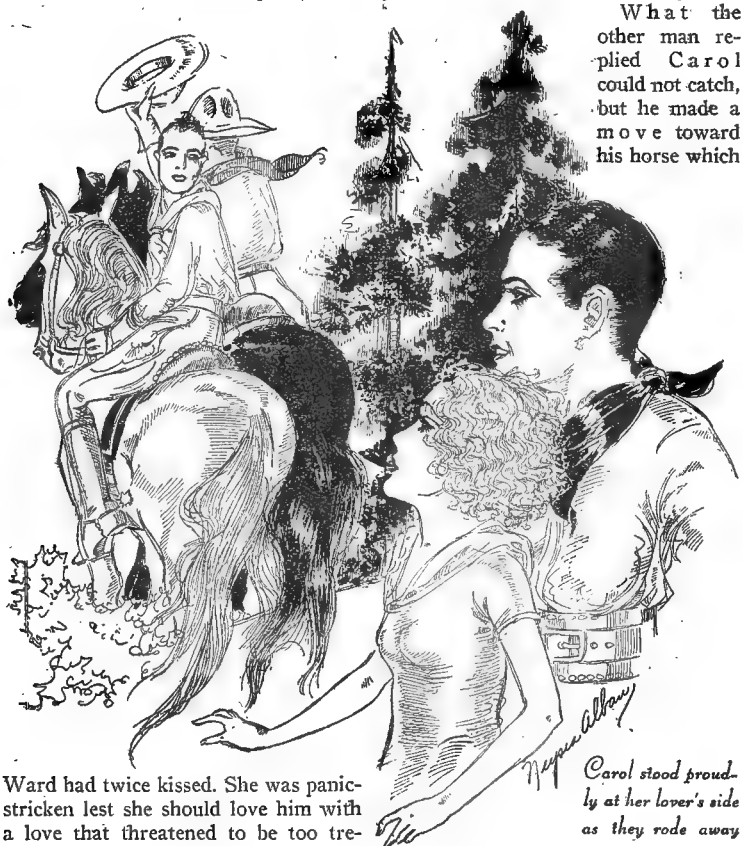
BACK in her room again, a tremulous rage possessed Carol as she leaned against her door with the back of one hand on the lips that Cal Ward had twice kissed. She was panic-stricken lest she should love him with a love that threatened to be too tremendous for her slight body, her delicate make-up—a love that she would never get over.

Anxious to know what passed between Ward and Dick Todd, she crept to her balcony. The two men stood just below her, close to Todd's horse. Cal was speaking, with his hands thrust into his wide leather belt.

"And so, Todd, you'll ride back where you came from. I'd like to see your dust without further delay!"

What the other man replied Carol could not catch, but he made a move toward his horse which sent a thrill of panic racing through her.

"Dick Todd!" she cried. "Don't go and leave me!"



Carol stood proudly at her lover's side as they rode away

Todd looked up at her and doffed his hat.

"You will be rescued, Miss Carol," he said earnestly. "I have to go because this man who is master here orders me off. I came to assure myself of your safety and to tell you about that telegram. I—"

Cal Ward put out one swift hand and locked it in Todd's collar. With no apparent effort he shook the lawyer back and forth.

"You know there was never a telegram," he said quietly. "You came here to poison her mind against me. You lied, and you have to admit it here and now. Tell her that this is just one more of the crooked tricks you've resorted to since you set up an office in Bonalto. Tell her!"

To Carol's horror, Todd turned appealing eyes upward to her when he replied:

"I lied. There was no telegram."

When Todd had mounted his horse and turned toward the road, Carol bent from the balcony, her hands flung out to him.

"Dick Todd, I believe you!" she cried. "Help me if you can!"

The day passed, and night came with its luminous lavender spell—the soft, witching night of the desert country. Carol, miserable, fighting a losing battle against Cal Ward in her heart, stole to her tryst with Graham Foster. She had made her decision. She was going with him, but she would use all her woman's wit to induce him to show her the way back to town. It was killing her pride and torturing her to remain there at Cal Ward's romantic ranch any longer.

Her own dinner she managed to hide when the Indian woman brought it, and she carried it to Foster, wrapped in brown paper.

He was there in the garden, watching for her. Again he fell upon the food in a manner that sickened her. Leaning against a tree trunk while he ate, she wondered about that telegram. Suppose Todd had told the truth! His denial had been forced from him through fear of Cal.

In any case, Carol could bear it no longer. She could escape from Graham when opportunity came. It would not be difficult, for her courage was high and her wit keen.

"Did you get the clothes and the water?" whispered Graham at last. "Darling, you are coming with me?"

"I can get the water," replied Carol wearily; "but the clothes I couldn't manage. I had no way of getting any."

"They'll never get us," said Foster eagerly. "You can win free of this Ward fellow, and we can be married in another State."

"I will never marry you now, Graham," Carol told him steadily. "I am only going with you so that you may help me back to Bonalto. Surely you will set me on the right trail! You owe me that."

"A delightful plan!" said a familiar drawling voice. "Put up your hands, Foster!"

IN one electrified moment Carol saw the desperation in Foster's face and the determination in Ward's. Without thought she flung her slight body upon the cattle thief, and, with her bare arms outthrust across him, faced her husband defiantly.

"Let him go!" she cried. "I love him!"

For a moment a tense silence held the little group under the cottonwoods. Then Ward gave a quick jerk of his head.

"Get out, Foster," he said curtly. "I'll give you half an hour."

Instantly Foster vanished. Carol stood there alone, facing Cal Ward, whose hand was still on the gun at his hip.

"That was brave," Cal told her, with a contempt that was like a flicked whip against her hot face. "It was brave, but foolish. You should have better sense than to love a cattle thief, a man wanted by the law, a man who could leave you in a desert town alone at midnight. If you have no more brains than to go about believing Dick Todd and fancying yourself in love with Graham Foster, you sure need me to look after you!"

Carol relaxed from the sickening tension that had held her since Cal discovered Foster alone with her in the garden. How could she tell this contemptuously smiling young man that she had lied to him, that she had no love for Foster, but only wanted to prevent Cal from killing him there at her feet?

"Thank you," she said simply, and walked past him meekly into the house.

In her own room Carol set about making her preparations. There was no doubt in her mind as to what she would do. The desert was the only way. She could start out on the trail by which they had come, hoping that she would remember the way back to Bonalto.

But she must have a horse. She knew there was usually one, at least, saddled down by the bunk house. A fair horsewoman, she did not feel afraid of anything save the desert that hemmed in the flowering ranch. She had asked the Indian woman as many questions regarding the ranch and the horses as she dared.

Presently, wearing her own little gown once more, Carol crept from the house. Taking with her a water bag that she had filled earlier in the evening, she went on her stealthy way to the bunk house, outside which she could see several horses standing. Her knees shaking, she lifted the bridle over the head of one of these. The spirited animal shied away from her, but she set her little foot in the stirrup and swung the horse's head around toward the sloping trail that led from the ranch.

From inside the bunk house came sounds of revelry—laughter and song and the hum of a banjo or two. Peering through the window as she stole by, she saw some of the boys playing cards. Through the window of the office building, farther on, she saw Cal Ward's head bent above a pile of ledgers on which he was working. Her eyes lingered wistfully on his firm jaw and his frowning brows. If he ever kissed her again as he had that day, she knew that she must give in to her love for him.

It was the height of foolishness to leave without any food; but she dared not try to take any. It had been sheer luck that her foraging for Foster had not been discovered. The trail was a much used one. She might come upon some campers. Anyhow, this was her only chance.

She was determined not to believe Cal Ward. From the first his intrusion into her life had been fantastic and unreal. That story about the telegram might possibly be true; and if she had a hundred thousand dollars—

As the night advanced and the tireless horse bore Carol on and on, she drooped with fatigue, and her love for Cal Ward grew stronger. She was frightened and very miser-

able. She was not sure that she was on the trail to Bonalto, though the horse never wavered in his loping progress, and perhaps she could trust to him.

Thoughts of Graham Foster tormented her. After thirty minutes a party would start from the ranch house to capture him. Suppose they found her and led her back in disgrace with the cattle thief!

Dawn came with incredible swiftness. Beyond a ridge of mountains ahead of the girl there ran a rim of crimson, which grew and merged into molten gold. The blazing sun rose, bringing with it a breeze that whipped little spirals of sand about the desert. The heat, coming after the chill of the exhausting night, began to burn through Carol's cloak. She was thirsty and hungry and utterly weary.

By this time she had come to her very sound senses. She realized that she had done a mad thing, and that she loved Cal Ward with an intensity of which she had not thought herself capable. She had a water bag, but no food. She was afraid to dismount, lest her horse might get away from her; but with the increasing heat it was imperative that both the animal and its rider should rest.

At last, in the slight shade of some rocks, she slipped from the saddle, flinging the reins over the horse's head, as she had seen the cowboys and Todd do when they wished a horse to stand. The animal nibbled some peeping points of green, while Carol nursed her aching bones and sipped a few precious drops from the water bag.

The heat grew unbearable. She had never known that there could be such heat, or such blinding reflections from brilliantly colored rocks and shifting sand. A burning air stirred her hair and brushed her cheeks. The thought of Cal's cool, green ranch brought a sob to her throat. She could see its grazing sheep, its reaches of meadow, its shadowing cottonwoods; and Cal had told her that it was hers!

If she had not been so frightened by the lie she had told Cal to save Foster, and by her growing love for her husband, she would not have left the ranch house in such a mad fashion. As a rule she was a girl with a level head. She wanted to live, but the lavender line of the mesas before her seemed to mock at her helplessness.

Suddenly she sprang erect with a shrill scream and seized her foot in her hands, while the horse lifted his head and regarded her with ears pricked. A queer-looking little creature had scuttled from the rock and bitten her just above her shoe. The pain was almost unendurable; but she retained enough of her senses to seize her horse and mount him again.

As she sat clinging dizzily to the saddle, there came into her mind thoughts of the story that Cal Ward and Jerry Banes had told her about the night when she arrived in Bonalto. Cal had been bitten by a rattler in the sun-parched desert, and because of the distance from any other aid they had dosed him with strong liquor, which otherwise he would not have touched. He had not been himself when he came to the station to meet the girl for whom the cattle thief had sent; but uppermost in his mind must have been the instinct to protect her. Why had she not believed him? Only too well, now, did she herself realize his plight.

THERE was not even any bad whisky to dose her with. There was nothing and no one. She would die out there on the merciless

sands, and her horse would wander off into the wilds. She had no idea where he was taking her, for the world was a burning, blazing ball of fire.

Only a dim consciousness remained to Carol when some one tugged at her bridle and spoke sharp, broken words that she only vaguely heard.

"You got a bad hurt—scorpion bite. Where you come from, *señorita?* This hot sun—"

She heard no more, although she opened her eyes languidly as she was pulled from the saddle, and rested indifferently upon the swarthy, bearded face of a Mexican. Through a haze she saw a little cabin and a woman hastening toward her. Cal's horse had brought her to some human habitation!

A cup was held to her lips, and a burning, torturing liquid—bad whisky, she fancied—was poured down her throat. For a moment it brought her stranglingly to herself. She passed her hand through her tangle of glorious hair.

"Where—what—" she stammered feebly.

The Mexican woman lifted the helpless girl in her strong arms and ran toward the cabin.

"Ramon, you bring more!" she called sharply. "The *señorita* has bad scorpion bite, and some folks that kill. Give her lots, and bring me the hot water!"

Carol was very ill and in great pain, but she held fast to herself as another cup of that dreadful stuff was held to her hot lips.

"What is this you are giving me?" she gasped.

The woman grinned.

"Not so very good whisky, *señorita,* but best we have. I pour a white powder now quick into the bite, and you sleep and forget and wake up well."

"Is this what they give for rattlesnake bite?" Carol inquired, as she obediently set the strangling cup to her lips.

"When they so lucky to have it, yes," replied the woman grimly. "It make sick—delirious—sleepy; but it save. On the desert it save many lives—oh, yes! Out there in hot sun, no water, scorpion bite or snake bite very bad."

"I understand," whispered Carol drowsily. "That cruel desert! Why couldn't I believe?"

The Mexican woman looked up from the girl's closed eyes, and nodded to her husband. He stepped forward, punctured the purple swelling on Carol's foot, rubbed a white powder upon it, and bound it up tightly with clean rags.

"She will sleep," said the woman. "Some it makes to walk around out of their heads, but this one will sleep, poor little *señorita!*"

Through a haze Carol heard the speaker's words, just before she dropped over the edge of things.

FOR two days Carol lay in a half stupor, while the swelling on her foot and ankle subsided and the effects of the dreadful liquid that the kindly Mexicans had poured down her suffering throat wore off. From her couch by the window she looked out upon the desert, which now she hated with a vicious hatred. It was a monster, and its measureless distances were hideous to her.

As she lay there, tended lovingly by the Mexicans, she longed for Cal Ward, and her mind was fully made up as to what she should do. She ate and drank eagerly, in order to regain

her strength, and every day she questioned the couple further about Ward and his desert ranch.

She learned enough to know that the wealth of the Wards went back many years, and that even if she had inherited a hundred thousand dollars it would have meant nothing to Cal. Both Foster and Todd had deceived her and lied to her. Oh, thank Heaven she had not trusted herself to the desert with Graham Foster!

More and more, as the hot days dragged on and the cool, exquisite nights succeeded them, she longed for Cal. She wondered what he was doing. Had he searched for her? What was he thinking?

She was glad that the scorpion had bitten her. Only in that way could she have been brought to realize that Cal Ward had told the truth about the night of their marriage. She could easily believe, now, that any one who was not accustomed to that burning liquid might walk about in a delirium after drinking a good dose of it. She had heard many strange tales of the desert since she had been in the Mexicans' cabin.

On the third morning she bathed and got into her own clothes, with the Mexican woman's help. Then, while her hostess brushed her tangled mass of golden hair, Carol made her statement quite calmly:

"I wish to be guided to the Ward ranch. I am Mrs. Ward. I rode out and got lost in the desert. Can Ramon take me there?"

She was Mrs. Ward! The sweet sound of it! She even longed for the heavy seal ring with which she had been married, and which she had left on the bureau at her boarding house in Bonalto.

"The Señora Ward!" gasped the Mexican woman. "We never knew there was one. You are, then, the fortunate *señora!* The Señor Ward, he have lands and money, and all the girls are crazee about him. You must love him much!"

"I do!" said Carol with sudden yearning.

ONCE more it was night on the desert. Purple shadows blended into silver bars and bands that stripped the vast sandy reaches of their horror, and left only their beauty.

Beside a murmuring spring Carol lay wrapped in Mexican blankets, and not far off the horses stirred near the fire that Ramon had lighted on a mountain ledge.

The Eastern girl was at peace with the world, although a thrilling sort of fear tingled along her nerves when she thought of returning to the ranch. Hitherto her high, fine pride had withheld her from the man who she believed had tricked her into wedding him; but now that same pride drove her back to his feet in complete surrender. He might do with her what he would, after her shameless avowal that she loved a cattle thief; but she would admit herself in the wrong, tell him of her love, and ask his forgiveness. She could not live unless she did that.

Ramon told her that at dawn they would start for the ranch. She lay listening to the call of the distant coyote, the trickling of the spring, the movements of the horses, the far-away hoot of an owl, and watching for the familiar rim of crimson along the distant mountain ranges.

It came at last, and outlined against it was a solitary horseman, rigid, motionless, as if painted there.

Carol gave a sudden cry and started up.

"Ramon, look far off there!" she cried. "It is Señor Ward! They are searching for me!"

Even as she spoke, her heart sank. Why should they look for her? Why were they not still searching for the rustler whom her lie had temporarily saved? Or perhaps they had caught Graham and were bringing him back!

A shudder rippled through her tense body as she peered at the distant horseman through the growing splendor of the sunrise. There was a little group of men about him now. It was useless to try to signal, but her whole soul knew that it was Cal who had stood there outlined against the rising sun.

The Mexican was breaking camp.

"Soon we be there, now, *señora*," he said gently. "We start before heat gets bad. If anything happen to you, the Señor Ward lick me!"

Nothing in Carol's life ever looked so lovely as the Ward ranch when she again glimpsed it down the curving trail they followed. Her horse, the one that she had taken on that dreadful night, pricked up his ears and hastened his steps. For girl and horse, the desert ranch, so picturesquely cool in the pitiless glare of the enfolding desert, was home!

At the porch step Carol gave her hand to Ramon.

"Stay and let Señor Ward thank you," she smiled. "I hope—that he will," she added, more to herself than to the Mexican.

When she opened the door of her room, the Indian woman greeted her with a low exclamation, and, without asking permission, wrapped the girl in her arms.

"They have been searching for White Rose," she told Carol. "Big Chief plenty crazy, and plenty mad, too. Say boys let wife get away on horse. Whee, how he rant around before they start out! Make things fly. But you come back alone?"

"No," said Carol. "A Mexican called Ramon brought me here. A scorpion bit me out on the desert, and my horse took me to Ramon's cabin. He and his wife have cared for me."

The Indian woman nodded. She was busily preparing a bath.

"Yes, scorpion bite plenty bad. Some folks die. Out there on desert no place for White Rose!"

Carol permitted the woman to serve her. She felt humiliated and nervous. What should she do or say when Cal returned? She had misjudged and hurt her husband, and it was time things were set right between them.

AFTER her luncheon, served by the adoring Indian woman, Carol dozed through the siesta hours in the hammock on her balcony, her aching foot propped on a cushion. She was roused by men's angry voices.

"I say, Ward, that if you married this girl as Todd says you did, and as Hildreth himself swears, and if you're keeping her here against her will, you shall pay heavily for it! We have come to take her back. Such high-handed methods won't go in this country. I don't know what we're coming to, what with cattle rustlers and weddings at a pistol point!"

The man who spoke—a big, burly individual in riding clothes—stood at the head of a little group of riders, facing Cal Ward and a few of his boys.

"She is not here," said Cal wearily. "She ran away from me. For three days I have been out looking for her.

It's not likely that she can still be alive, a dainty little thing like her, alone on the desert; and if she isn't, you may do as you wish with me!"

Carol hurried from her room, forgetting her foot, her cheeks crimson and her eyes blazing. She did not think of pride or humiliation. The way had been shown to her. She could atone!

The men before the ranch house stared in silence as the slender white figure ran across the porch and paused by Cal's side.

"I heard what you said," she told them bravely, her lovely little head erect. "I have come down to set you all right. When Cal Ward married me, he didn't know what he was doing. He had been bitten by a rattler out in the desert, and his men had filled him full of bad whisky to save his life. I guess you all understand how that could be, although until lately I didn't believe him. I know now that he spoke the truth, for the desert taught me. A scorpion bit me three days ago out there in the blazing sun, where I was lost; and a Mexican and his wife forced me to drink some of that awful stuff. I know now what it's like. There's just one more thing. I'm not a prisoner here. I'm Cal Ward's wife, and I'm staying at his ranch because"—her head went up a little higher, and a glory shot into her dark eyes—"because I love him!"

The men from Bonalto looked at one another sheepishly. With love they had little to do. They drew back.

"I reckon, then, Mrs. Ward, we'd better vamose," said the burly individual who had spoken first. "Dick Todd and Hildreth together had the whole town stirred up about you. We couldn't believe it of Cal, but we had to investigate. We got no time to waste, for we're still out after Foster. Our apologies, Cal, and we hope you'll be happy, ma'am. No better fellow in this State than Cal Ward!"

CAROL stood there proudly at Cal's side while they rode away, splashing through the brook and turning on the other side of it to wave their hats. Then, as she laid her hand on the screen door, suddenly overwhelmed by confusion, the boys who had ridden home with Cal drifted off, exchanging delighted grins as they left Carol with her bridegroom.

Cal Ward took a quick stride after her as she got the door open at last. He wasted no time, but took her firmly and tenderly in his arms, bending that flashing smile of his close to her flushed face.

"Carol, you had me scared to death," he said a little unsteadily. "You left me—cruelly!"

"Yes," said Carol softly, "but I came back to you—gloriously! I owe you so many apologies! I couldn't go on to Bonalto without telling you that I believe everything you have ever said, and that I only told you I loved Graham Foster to save you from having to kill him. I wanted to tell you, too, that I knew Todd lied about the money and the telegram, and—"

"And what else, sweetheart?" whispered Cal.

"And that I adore you, Cal!" said Carol in one glorious surrender, turning her head suddenly to meet his lips with a caress as eager as his own.

Would you like one of the illustrations of this story free? Turn to page 160 and see how you can get one

"Bunty, speak to me—darling— Oh, Bunty, I love you!"

The Right Proposal

Love came wearing a mask, but the eyes of their hearts told Maida and Gerry true!

By Daisy Dalyrimple

PILE upon pile of delicate, frothy underwear: chiffons, silks, satins, laces, embroidered webs of the loveliest, most fragile shades—lilac, baby's lips, sunrise, daffodil—frailest flowers of lingerie, fit for the garden of a princess's boudoir. Here, stockings fine as mist; there, day pyjamas brocaded black and gold, with vivid coats—scarlet, tangerine, rose.

Gerry packed them reverently in folds of tissue paper. She knew clothes and she loved them. The touch of the gossamer fabrics to her was like the touch of brush and palette to an artist. Never, she supposed, as long as she lived, would she be able to own such exquisite garments as these of Maida's!

But Gerry was not really envious.

She was sound and sweet and generous. She took life as it came, and gave thanks for the good bits. Maida was her fairy godmother; she had saved her from starvation—literally. Gerry had been unable to get a job even as waitress that day when she had been turned out of her lodging house. She had been crying—helplessly—when Maida had knocked her down with the little red roadster.

She hadn't been badly hurt, but Maida had been frightened. She had taken the dazed girl home to the six-room apartment at El Cortez, and since then Gerry had lived with her, humbly thankful for the careless kindness, the pretty second bedroom, the easy work, and the fair salary.. The thought of hunting a job again terrified her; a thousand times better be maid-companion to the rich society girl than struggle with a heartless business world.

Anyway, it would be fun to get away from San Diego for a while...

Gerry began to play her favorite game—the game she loved playing when she was folding Maida's clothes. To-morrow was to be her wedding day. She, Gerry, owned this lovely trousseau—every bit of it. She and—Ray—were going to La Chula—for their honeymoon. Why, there he was, knocking at the door!

"Come in," she whispered—so Maida wouldn't hear. And then she caught her breath.

Surely no man living could be as handsome, as utterly endearing and thrilling as Ray Veers. There he almost stood—seventy-four inches of perfection. Smooth hair like sun glinting on a viking's helmet. Mysterious purple-blue eyes with upper and lower decks of brown-black lashes. Features like a Roman sun god—hawk nose; short, clean-shaved upper lip; arrogant chin. Devastating. Gorgeous.

"Hello, sweetheart, how's the packing going? And what are all these cobwebs?" A pause, then: "Holy mustard!"

"You mustn't look," she scolded gayly, and threw a cover over some of the articles.

"Gosh, but that was frightfully lingerie of me," he apologized.

She could almost hear his light banter. She could almost feel him pick her up as though she were thistle-down—hold her to his face and—

But here was the curious part of these pretend scenes: always when she came to this breathless moment, she was interrupted—or else she was too shy to go on with it. Or perhaps her powers of invention failed. Strange that she could go no farther than this tingling moment of anticipation!

Maida interrupted now while Gerry was still struggling to bring about that make-believe kiss.

"Do you remember the flame feather mules?" Maida wanted to know.

"Yes. I think I have everything. How long shall we stay in La Chula?"

"That all depends. If I weren't a cripple it would take no time at all."

She glared at the slender steel framework on her left ankle. Her great brown eyes filled with tears. Instantly Gerry was beside her, a small tornado of sympathy.

"Darling, no one would ever notice it. You can walk as well as I can. You could even dance if you'd try."

Maida shook her head. "Once I let the idea pour over me, but the men didn't take to it with salvos of joy—not when they looked at that harness."

"Well, what difference does it make? They all love you. You could marry any one you know."

Which was more or less true, for Maida's luscious brunette beauty, combined with her considerable fortune, made her very eligible.

"Yes," was the gloomy reply, "and most of them look like the answer to a minnow's prayer. Gerry, in all the years I've lived—and I'm twenty-seven now—only one man has even touched my imagination. And—and that's the reason we're going to La Chula."

INSTANTLY she had Gerry's complete attention. "But—how romantic! Why didn't you tell me before? Will he be there?"

"Yes, he'll be there. And at last I'll see him. He won't be just part of a dream any more."

"You mean you've never seen him?"

"No. Isn't it enough to make a clam wail! I don't even know what he looks like. He's one of these shy critters that runs from the camera."

They made a striking contrast, Maida and Gerry—Maida dark and vivid; Gerry hazel-eyed and golden-haired. Maida like a polished jewel; Gerry like a spring flower. Maida petite; Gerry tall and slight with the engaging awkwardness of nineteen. Maida a little hard; Gerry wistful and tender.

"Then why did you fall so hard for him?"

"Why did I fall? You sweet innocent, can't you imagine a girl falling for an ideal?"

Gerry flushed brightly. "Yes—I can."

"Well, that's how it is. I've always loved men who got out of the ruts and did unusual things. When I was a child at school my heroes were all great sailors, or explorers, or pirates—principally pirates. I suppose that surprises you."

"Yes. It does, a little. You're so vivid, so alive, Maida, that I think of you as a lusty young jazz queen surrounded by sleek tango sheiks."

"With this foot!"

"Now, lay off that foot. No one but you ever thinks of it."

"All right, I'll be good. To continue, all my childish fairy castles built themselves round a certain romantic globe-trotter; and the man is in La Chula right now, little dreaming that this forty horse-power siren is on her way to him."

Gerry's hazel eyes were two shining questions. Maida smiled.

"Since you *must* know everything, I'll tell it all. You see, I financed my cousin, Margaret Vane, in a boarding house venture. She took a lovely old villa two miles out of La Chula, and ever since she's written me endless accounts of her lodgers. It's been a bore to read about them, but now I have my reward. In her last letter she mentioned—quite casually, picture that!—that my famous and illusive darling was actually under her roof with his secretary. Honey, can you blame me for rushing us off this way?"

"But who is he?"

"Ah—that's the point. He's the shyest little hero-lion a girl ever tried to vamp. He's made record trips by air and by sea, he's discovered new islands in the South Pacific, new countries in South America. He's put down native insurrections, he's fought battles with savages and wild animals. There are two things he's afraid of—both of them are girls; yet as a heartbreaker he could hole out in one. Guess?"

Gerry could. For the last few minutes her heart had been sinking dizzily—down, down. Every word of Maida's pointed more and more clearly to one unmistakable identity.

"Do you mean—Ray Veers?" she asked in small, controlled tones.

Maida sighed. "Aren't I crazy to fall for a man like that? Me and a million other girls. But he simply chloroforms me. What's there about him that gets us that way?"

Gerry didn't answer at once, because she couldn't. At last:

"But surely you've seen him, Maida?"

"No," said Maida with one of those hollow, mirthless laughs. "As I told you, I haven't even seen a picture of him. But I know he's handsome—every one knows that."

Then Gerry, slowly and painfully:

"Once about a year ago—*I* saw Ray Veers."

Wildly Maida turned on her. "Heavens, woman, why didn't you say so at once. Where was it?"

"At the Hotel del Coronado."

"Well—for the love of fifty-seven varieties of pickled curses!"

"Yes. Laura Lane, a girl I know who married money—loads of it—invited me over for dinner. Ray Veers was there at the time—he and his secretary."

"Tell me quick before I have an attack or something—is he as handsome as they say he is?"

"He's very handsome. You won't be disappointed. But wait till you meet him."

"Did *you* meet him?"

"No. He never noticed me. When I was leaving the hotel I tripped on the stairs and Mr. Veer's secretary caught my arm. That's the nearest I came to meeting them."

"Gerry—did he seem shy?"

"I couldn't tell; but he must be, because Laura said he ran away next day. And he's never gone to a fashionable hotel since."

"Halleluja—that's why he picked on Margaret's place. No flappers—just a nice bunch of old ladies—and little Maida with her tambourine all set. Won't the dear old house get a temperature at the sight!"

Maida left the room, all smiles and radiance, while Gerry knelt by the wardrobe trunk, slim hands convulsively clutching a violet and silver negligée.

She was alone, but this time she played no glad foolish game with a ghost.

One of a million! That's all she was. The very special beautiful feeling that flowered in her breast was not individual enough to call from her heart to his and make itself felt. With all those other hearts crying in chorus, her call would be lost in a wilderness of static.

From the V at her throat she pulled up a fine chain. She opened a thin gold locket and looked at the inscribed picture inside. "Ray Veers—a modern d'Artagnon." Maida was mistaken. There had been one picture snapped of this high-hearted adventurer. She had cut it from a San Diego rotogravure section.

Tears suddenly blinded her.

MISS MARGARET'S house at La Chula was of imitation Spanish adobe, embowered in clematis and wisteria. A lemon eucalyptus and two pepper trees shaded the garden. There was a fountain and a hedge of Japanese quince.

Inside there were heavy iron grilles and stairways, Spanish chests, love seats, and carelessly draped shawls. Gerry loved it all. She and Maida had a suite of two rooms and a bath, with a Juliette balcony overlooking the patio.

"My old ladies mostly sleep at this

hour of the day," Miss Margaret told them. "The two gentlemen are playing golf. Would you two girls like to go for a swim?"

Innocently Maida asked: "Is the golf course anywhere near?" Miss Margaret pointed it out from the balcony. "Just over there? As near as that? Why, suppose we take a little walk, Gerry."

Gerry wore a sea-green sports frock with a Japanese sunshade. Maida, in cool white, snatched a red shawl.

"Not quite suitable," she smiled, "but very effective."

They sauntered through the staggering village, past uneven avenues of hibiscus, till they came to a gate opening into a little poppy field.

"And there's another gate opposite." said Maida. "We can make a short cut and save all that winding road."

Gerry's head was spinning like a top. In a little while she would see Ray Veers. Why, almost any minute they might come upon him. She lifted the iron hoop that held the gate, and went in with Maida.

"Honey—" Maida's hand on her arm was nervous and cold; Maida's limp was more pronounced than usual. "Do I look all right? Do I really look all right?"

"Foolish, of course you're lovely. Besides your natural charms the set of scenery adorning you would knock any man for a row of hospital tents."

"Bless you, child. Once more I smile. By nature I lean toward flattery like a sail to a breeze. Great Goliath—what's that?"

Her smile came out by the roots. From somewhere sounded a horrid noise—a queer angry bellow. Turning quickly the girls saw a great black bulk charging down on them. They screamed in unison.

"Run—quick—run!" Dropping her parasol Gerry caught Maida by the hand and dragged her toward an oak tree in the middle of the field.

"But my foot—I can't make it—Gerry—oh, save me—save me!"

The bull had reached the parasol. It paused in its mad advance, plowing up the earth—blowing like a grampus. It tossed the pretty thing on angry horns.

Half dragging Maida, Gerry ran steadily toward the tree. Presently the enemy danced backward on furious small feet and charged again.

"Hurry—hurry—o-oh!" It was a cry of despair. Gerry thought it was all over. But just then some one shouted lustily and threw a rock. The bull veered to one side.

That gave Gerry her chance. She got Maida and herself behind the tree and, arms encircling the weaker girl, stood ready to dodge either way.

Small, wicked red eyes. The great animal commenced a wary circling. This was to be a game of inches. It seemed as though some one was bound to be caught on those long sharp horns. And then, out of nowhere, came the young toreador.

He was tall and dark and slim—agile as a wolfhound. He tore Maida's red shawl from her shoulders and stepped out before the bull.

"Run for the gate!" he shouted to the girls.

"Come—hurry, Maida!"

Gerry pulled and dragged. A fleeting glance showed her their rescuer playing with the bull, teasing him, decoying him with the red silk shawl, leading him deftly in the other direction. The snorts, the angry bellows, froze her blood.

She got Maida three-quarters of the way to the gate, and could drag

her no farther. Maida fell in a pitiful little heap—and at this crucial moment came more help.

A great blond man dashed in, picked the helpless girl up in his arms, and ran back with her. Gerry darted after him. Her heart was pounding so that it suffocated her. Her head was bursting. She saw the gate looming before her—and suddenly she couldn't see it. The little field was bathed in darkness.

FOR a few minutes Gerry knew nothing at all; then slowly she opened her eyes once more. There was the field; there the good bright sun; and there bending over her—she gave a great happy sigh—was Ray Veers.

So Ray was the blond giant who had come to her rescue when Maida fell! Afterward he had gone back for Gerry. She was still in his arms. His eyes, at close range, were just as she had imagined them—beautiful, purple-blue, dark lashed.

"Feeling better?" he asked.

"Yes—thanks. Where's Maida?"

"The other girl? She's fine. Hurt her ankle. That's all."

Gerry remembered something else. She sat up and looked across the field. The slim dark youth had decoyed the bull to the edge of the fence. For one terrible moment it seemed as though nothing could save him. That brutal lowered head with its slashing horns!

Gerry screamed. Maida screamed. And then, hooded with the brilliant shawl, furiously shaking himself, the bull charged down the line of fence, while the toreador leaped over it.

"That's Bunty for you," said the blond giant. "I've seen him get out of tighter corners than that. It's easier to catch a flea than Bunty."

Relieved that there was to be no carnage, the two girls turned with one accord and feasted their eyes on the young Roman sun god.

"If you hadn't come," said Maida worshipfully, "where would I be now?"

"And to think of me making it harder for you by fainting!" from Gerry.

"Look here—you two girls mustn't talk that way." He seemed bashful as a boy. "I didn't do a thing. Bunty did it all. And as for fainting—well, I don't blame you. Any girl would."

He took Maida's arm on one side, and Gerry's on the other, but before they had gone five steps, Maida faltered.

"I can't walk," she moaned.

"Then I must carry you," said the man. He turned to Gerry with a smile: "Can you manage?"

Gerry's heart was bitter. The touch of his arm was a baptism of glory. And now she couldn't have—even this. Maida must have it all—both arms. Surely she wasn't as lame as all that!

Heart stormy, Gerry followed—and presently Bunty, who had so gamely engaged the bull, joined her. He repudiated her thanks, made light of what he had done, and told Gerry what a shock he had got when she fainted.

"Sure you're all right now?"

"Right as rain," she told him, her eyes before her, mutinous on the splendid viking with the complaisant Maida in his arms. "It was awfully silly of me."

She got quite a surprise when she heard Bunty say: "But look here—we've met before, haven't we?"

She turned to him and in a flash recognized him as the young secretary who had caught her arm the time she tripped on the steps at the Coronado Hotel. She hesitated, and saw that he

wasn't quite sure of himself. His brown eyes were puzzled.

"No, I don't think so," she said. "At least, I don't remember."

Instantly she was ashamed of herself. Nothing but temper had made her do that—temper because she plainly saw that it would be part of her duties as Maida's companion to entertain this young man for the next week, while Maida spread her pretty nets for Ray Veers—"Jig," as Bunty called him.

WHEN they reached the house Miss Margaret and her old ladies made a great fuss. They insisted on sending for the doctor. They ordered fresh hot tea.

Maida was placed like a princess on one of the love seats. In this point of vantage every one appeared to hover round her. Maida's cheeks flushed softly—she bloomed with the success of her maneuvers.

"I suppose after all these thrilling rescues and things, you know each other," said Miss Margaret. "I mean, you've introduced yourselves?"

"But we haven't," said Maida gently. "Not a single name has been mentioned."

Miss Margaret threw up her hands. "Think of that, Maida, my dear"—she turned to Bunty, who was trying unsuccessfully to make conversation with Gerry—"this is the famous explorer, Mr. Ray Veers—of course you've often read of him. And this," turning to Jig, "is Mr. Loring, who travels with him."

A tottering silence fell on Maida and Gerry. Vaguely Gerry heard her own name mentioned, and made some perfunctory acknowledgment. Then her thoughts wheeled madly about Mr. Veers and his secretary.

Why had they exchanged names? What did it mean? Both from having seen them at Coronado, and from the picture she had clipped from the paper, she knew they were masquerading. But why the false colors?

Almost at once, between sips of tea, it came to her. Of course Ray Veers, shyest of supermen, was making his secretary wear his name to avoid girls and hero worship on his holiday. Only as an inconspicuous young secretary could he be free of both. Probably at night he and Bunty would exchange confidences and laugh their heads off over the things the girls had said to the wrong men. Horrid. Ungallant.

Then all at once Gerry saw how it worked, for Maida called to Bunty in her sweet, languorous voice to come and tell her about his trips. And presently Gerry was sitting beside the darling of her dreams.

For the rest of the afternoon and evening Gerry was in heaven. She wore her prettiest frock to dinner—a cream lace over lilac that Maida had given her—and afterward she strolled with Jig under the stars, and felt his hand guiding her arm, and laughed—and giggled—and made crazy jokes. Because the world was a beautiful violet jewel, and she was madly happy.

"It's great to meet a girl like you," Jig told her. "Honestly, I don't always know how to talk to girls—I feel like an elephant or something—but you're different—you're so jolly—and sweet." And his precious hand tightened on her arm.

Bunty was somewhere in the house with Maida, whose ankle had to be nursed. The old ladies turned on the radio, and Jig and Gerry, smothering their giggles, danced a little on the wide veranda—Jig's hand warm over Gerry's, his arm cozily about her, the air sweet with wisteria, heady as wine.

It must have gone to Jig's senses, for just before they went in he drew Gerry very close and stooped his great tall head.

She knew he was going to kiss her—that at last the thing she had never been able to imagine was going to happen to her. And suddenly she was terrified. It was too wonderful—all this at once—with hardly any effort on her part.

"There's—some one coming," she extemporized frantically. "Please—*please* let me go!"

Incredibly she pushed him back and ran trembling into the house; then up the broad stairs to her room. There were fluffy shadows and billows of moonlight on the Juliette balcony. Gerry slipped out on it, sank into a low chair, and covered her face with her hands.

Oh, why had she been afraid to take the great gift when it was offered her?

Then came a happy thought. Perhaps she had been guided. A man like Ray Veers would think more of a girl who didn't let him kiss her at once. She rested elbows on knees, hot cheeks in palms, and looked out through the amethyst moonlight.

Love—the love of her dreams—had come, all in a moment. After that threatened kiss she never doubted that she could win Ray.

"I wonder," said a cool voice, "just what would make a girl look like that."

Gerry gave a little cry. "Maida!"

"Yes, my dear. I've been sitting here half an hour thinking that for a girl-dodger Ray Veers has walked into a peck of trouble, and maybe he won't hate it—the way a cat hates cream!" She laughed softly. "Have you, by any strange chance, lost your heart to the blond secretary?"

Gerry's house of cards crashed about her. For six hours she had nursed the secret that the "blond secretary" was Ray Veers himself. But not a hint of it had she passed on to Maida.

Suddenly she realized what she was doing. Maida had rescued her from real poverty. Maida had given her a pleasant home, easy tasks. Instead of making a servant of her, as she might easily have done, she had taken her on as an equal. There were worse people in the world than Maida.

Yet she got her ready for bed, dressed the weak ankle, and turned out the light without saying a word—except chitter chatter.

IN her own room Gerry stood shivering a minute before she undressed. She tried to say her prayers—the way she always had since she was a little girl—but somehow they wouldn't come. She kept thinking of Maida's ankle in its iron support, of all the things Maida couldn't do because of it. She got into bed and pulled the covers over her head to shut out the moonlight. She crushed her eyes hard into the pillow and tried not to think. But it was no use.

At last, with a sigh that was half a sob, she got up, a forlorn little figure in flopping pyjamas, and crept barefooted into Maida's room.

"Maida, are you asleep?"

"No. What's wrong?"

"I—I have something to confess."

"For heaven's sake—you sound like Mary Jane just returned from the wicked city. Who's done wrong by our Gerry? Out with it, child.

Very quietly she told Maida that the two men—Bunty and Jig—had exchanged names. The famous young explorer was really his secretary, and *vice versa*.

"I—knew at once. Besides, I have

a picture of Ray Veers with his name under it. I'll show you if you like."

She switched on the bed lamp and held out the clipping in her locket.

"Hm, you certainly concealed this like leprosy," said Maida slowly. "Knowing that perfectly gorgeous hemale was the man I've dreamed about for five years, you fubbed me off with Bunty. I guess this is final proof that the blond lad's popularity is a menace to his bachelor tastes. Honestly, child, I've a notion to fire you."

"All right. I'll go."

"No you won't," said Maida quickly. "After all, you're a pretty decent little sort, Gerry, and I need you the way bread needs butter. Thinking he was Ray Veers, I got the young secretary—the Bunty boy—to say he'd take us all to the Capistrano Mission tomorrow. I was to go in the Veers roadster, but now I'll do a transfer. You shall go with Bunty while I travel in my own car with Handsome. Don't ask how I'll work it. I always oil my machinery so no one hears the backfire." Then dreamily: "Gosh, he's so sweet I could pour custard on him and eat him for dessert."

Gerry went back to her bed and wept softly and hopelessly into her pillow. The rewards of virtue nearly always go veiled.

Morning came and she bathed her tear-marred eyes with rose water. Miss Margaret sent breakfast trays to the two girls. There was also a note to Maida signed "Bunty":

> If I may have your keys I'll get the two cars out at half past nine. Jig and I'll be waiting with smiles romping across the facial scenery. Toodle-oo.

Maida gave her orders. "You go first, honey, and send Handsome back to carry me down. My ankle's too stiff for me to walk this morning. I'll arrange the rest."

So!

Gerry went down, a heart-broken little slave to honor. She smiled with stiff lips at Bunty, who, slim and dark-eyed, stood by Ray Veer's green roadster. Somehow she found herself climbing into it.

"Maida wants Mr. Loring to help her with the stairs," she told him.

No trouble about that. "I'll see that Jig gets the message." Bunty dashed to the veranda and was back almost at once.

"Miss Margaret 'll tell him. Nice little lady. And now—watch my dust, Miss Gerry."

He seemed to be in high spirits—also in a hurry. He started the engine and presently they were shooting north along *El Camino Real*, with the sea on their left. It occurred to Gerry that Maida had certainly well oiled her machinery. The transfer had gone so well it had almost skidded.

"It's queer," said Bunty, "but I can't shake the idea that we've met before. Somehow I seem to—*know* you."

Gerry smiled at him, a wan, unconvincing, second-best smile, and presently she got him talking about Jig, and about adventures they had both had together. He talked easily and lightly, this dark youngster. In fact he would have been a pleasant enough companion if Gerry's heart had not been in the car behind.

At one place Bunty bought ice cream cones, at another hot dogs and peanuts. There was something incurably kiddish about him. He loved funny stories, limericks, and laughter. Anxiously he watched Gerry for signs of approval. With faint amusement she realized that he would have stood on his head

or turned cart wheels if by such means he could entertain her.

Once he said: "You never even smiled at that one. Can it be that I'm not as engaging as my mother said I was!"

At San Juan Capistrano Maida's red car caught up with them, and they all had lunch together at the inn.

At once Gerry saw that Maida had made progress with Jig. His asides to Gerry were a little apologetic. She concluded that Maida too had learned the secret of making him feel less like an "elephant."

After lunch they went through the beautiful old mission, with its wealth of flower beds, its secret garden for the padres, and its atmosphere of Spanish-Indian romance. Maida clung to Jig, who helped her tenderly; Gerry got no smallest chance to break away from Bunty.

On the long drive home it was still that way, Gerry vehemently telling herself that she could not stay to watch the finish. It was more than any human heart could endure.

AND yet she did stay. She did bear it. Perhaps it was because she dreaded giving up her job. But whatever the reason, for the next ten days she watched Maida angle the heart of the big blond explorer—complaining all the time that oysters were orators compared with him.

They motored together, they played golf, they swam in the Cove. They hunted pale moonstones and sharks' eggs that burrowed like corkscrews into the sand; while Gerry teamed with Bunty. Maida could swim very little; but Gerry was venturesome—perhaps because she didn't care what happened to her, now that her ideal man was interested in Maida.

With Bunty once on a mild day she swam far out beyond the Cove walls.

"Though you must never do this without me," he told her. "If the life guard were watching he'd shoo us back. Let the least bit of a squall come up and we'd be dashed against the cliffs below Pelican Point."

Another time, at low tide, they climbed in bathing shoes through the rocky pools, alive with starfish, clinging abalones, and baby octopi, to the small lighthouse at Pelican Point, and chatted with the guard, who showed them all his life-saving paraphernalia.

On other days they went to San Luis Rey Mission and east to Jacumba and other mountain resorts.

Coming back one starry night from a trip through groves of lemon and avocado trees, Bunty turned two wistful brown eyes to Gerry and said—in a voice that strove to master a threatening huskiness:

"I suppose there's no use, Gerry—I mean—you couldn't get to think about me any—er—well—any special way, could you?"

She was startled. She had always known Bunty liked her, but she had never thought of him as a serious person.

"In any special way? What in the world do you mean?"

He laughed a little ruefully. "Gosh—you must know what I mean, Gerry. To me you're a very—special girl, and I feel about you in a very—special way."

Which, she supposed, was his fluent way of saying, "I love you."

She couldn't think of any answer. It was on the tip of her tongue to say: "But you're so young, Bunty." And in time she remembered that this would wound him to the core of his soul. After all, he wasn't so terribly

young—he must be twenty-four or twenty-five—almost as old as Ray Veers.

"Is there—any hope?" he asked in a frantically eager tone.

"Only," said Bunty dismally, "not quite. Just almost—and that isn't enough. For—I'd like to be first with you, Gerry. You're the sort of girl that—that makes a fellow think it

Suddenly Maida faltered. "Oh, I can't walk!" she moaned. Gerry's heart seethed within her

"Why, I like you just frightfully, Bunty," she told him. "You're a darling—a perfect peach and a lamb."

"Oh, heck," he groaned, wrinkling his forehead. "Please don't say a thing like that."

"But you are. I like you more than almost any man I know. Only—"

would be heaven to be first with you, Gerry, darling!"

INCOHERENT, stumbling, and a little tragic. That was Bunty.

Gerry's heart softened to him. She felt like weeping, because she knew just how he was feeling; she had

reason to know and sympathize. She laid her hand over his on the wheel.

"Bunty, dear—I'm sorry."

He turned his hand about, caught hers, and gave it a quick squeeze.

"Don't," he begged, "don't be sorry. I don't quite—like you to pity me. Tell me, Gerry, there's some one else, isn't there?"

She hesitated and said: "Yes, there is. Some one who doesn't care as much for me as I do for you."

"You—like him an awful lot?"

It seemed hard—impossible—for Bunty to bring out the word love. And that, too, was rather dear of him.

"An awful lot, Bunty."

"Look here—if I've a crust, just bean me, will you? But I have a reason for asking. Is it Jig?"

She denied it so quickly and hotly that she might as well have told the truth. There was silence for a while. Then:

"The reason I asked that," said Bunty slowly, "is because if we've been chasing round together—I mean you and me instead of you and Jig—it's been my fault."

"Your fault!" Considering that Maida had engineered the whole transfer, Gerry was reasonably amazed. "How's that?"

"Well—didn't I sort of run off with you the day we went to Capistrano? Remember? I hadn't been able to sleep that night for thinking of you. I knew Jig liked you pretty well and—maybe I didn't play square. I guess I banked on the old adage about all being fair in love and war, and stole a march."

Gerry could have laughed hoarsely when she realized what stanch if misplaced support he had given Maida. There was a muted thread of bitterness in her retort.

"I don't think you can blame yourself too heavily. After that first day your marches were easily stolen, weren't they?" Then, horrified at having betrayed so much: "Anyway, Jig's for Maida. See how well they look together—brunette and viking."

"Perhaps," said Bunty mournfully. "Still, even yet I note no mad rush for the exits on Jig's part when you appear, Gerry."

They ran through the spicy lemon groves with the violet night pulsing under the stars, and brooded on their sad thoughts. At last:

"It's true—that I've seen you before," said Bunty. "I remember all about it now."

"Yes. At Coronado." The words slipped out somehow.

Instantly he turned on her. "Then you knew me? You remembered me? You knew about the change of names?"

She was fairly caught. "Yes, I knew you and Jig had changed names."

He forced a laugh. "And you never said a word!"

She too forced a laugh. "Oh, I'm as deep as the Masonic order. Just the same, I knew just as soon as Miss Margaret introduced us."

"And did you tell Maida?"

This put her in a quandary. It occurred to her that if Bunty told Jig that Maida knew he was really Ray Veers, Maida would look cheap. It seemed to Gerry at this moment that there was just one course open to her.

"Of course I didn't," she said.

LATER, when he helped her out of the car, something in the touch of his hand communicated his loneliness, his disappointment. Gerry's heart ached for him.

"Bunty," she whispered, "will you promise me something?"

"Anything, my dear."

"You won't try to throw Jig and me together now, will you? I'd hate it if you did. And you'll stay on being friends with me, won't you—for the few days we're all here at La Chula together?"

She could see his eyes shining on her in the starlight. "If I offered you to Jig it would be with the graceful cordiality of a Gila monster—and in the midst of the kind act my murderous instincts might overpower me. Still, Gerry, if I can do it without throwing you in a questionable light I'll take ether and do it."

"Bunty, you dear idiot, he's Maida's property—and I'll hate you if you interfere. Now promise—promise, I say!"

"All right."

"Thank you, Bunty. Just to show we're good friends, will you kiss me good night?"

He had both her hands in his. He stooped and touched his lips to a floating bit of her silver-gold hair; then released her and said:

"That was a sweet impulse, Gerry—and may it be entered to my credit in the Big Book that I didn't take advantage of it. Good night, dear."

As she reached her room Maida called for her to come out to the balcony. The stars, bright as miniature moons, shone on the great velvet clematis that shadowed Maida's face; and somehow Gerry had a feeling that it hid traces of storm—of tears.

"Is anything wrong?" she asked.

"Anything wrong? Oh, no." A breath of laughter distinctly lemon flavored, a shrug that lifted the roof. "Except that you interest me strangely, Gerry."

"Me? Whatever for?"

"I'm wondering what you do to the men. You have Bunty turning cart wheels and whistling sob solos. And I'm not at all sure you aren't the paprika in Jig's stew—which seems to make you unanimous."

For an instant there were shrieks of silence. Then:

"You're crazy, Maida! Jig adores you. Any one can see that he's sunk to his blond smokestacks."

"Oh, indeed. He adores me while he strains his system listening for stray pearls I may let fall on the subject of my girl friend—or else watches you with eyes like a pair of melting moons. Honestly—sometimes I hate you."

She began to cry with a touch of hysteria, and for the next half hour Gerry had her hands full.

Soothing, protesting, denying, she got Maida to bed, tucked hot water bottles round her, and gave her a hot drink.

"Now stop crying and listen to me," she ordered at last. "It's not true that Jig cares two pins about me, but if he did—if he asked me to marry him, Maida, I—I would. See how honest I'm being with you! So, to save any trouble, I'm going back to San Diego to-morrow."

Maida whimpered a little, but finally consented.

"I'll get all my things packed first thing in the morning, and I'll leave on the noon bus, when you're all out swimming. I'll leave word for you that I got a telegram."

Maida drew her down and kissed her. "You're A-plus, Gerry, even if you do put stripes in my disposition. I'll never forget this."

ALL night Gerry lay sleepless, her eyes on the creeping shadows, her thoughts a strange delirious triumph. Jig cared a little, in spite of

everything; both Bunty and Maida seemed to think so. He had been fascinated by Maida's beauty and kindness, but even now she—Gerry—could win him back to that first blossoming interest, that forerunner of love. Knowing this, to give him up seemed somehow less painful. She couldn't tell why.

She had breakfast in her room, and said good-by to Maida, who, about eleven, went to the Cove to swim with Jig and Bunty. Gerry finished her packing and then slipped out for a last walk along the cliffs she loved.

Here below Miss Margaret's villa they rose to rocky castles carved by centuries of backwash. To-day there was a whistling wind, newly risen, and a high sea running. The surf beat against the excavated cliff line with the roar of artillery, and rose forty feet, curving backward in a crescent of foam.

Gerry's face was moist with the spray; her eyes were wet with tears as she looked out toward the Cove and southward to Pelican Point, directly before her.

Out of the wind a voice said:

"Look at that, will you, miss? And on a day with a tricky tide like this. What do the darn fools expect!"

It was the gardener from Miss Margaret's, a wizened, bent little old man with a pair of glasses leveled out to sea.

"Why, I didn't see you, John," said Gerry. "What are you looking at?"

"Two fellows, miss—they've swam out past the Cove walls and got caught in the current. They can't get back to shore."

Gerry's heart skipped a beat. "Let me look."

With the glasses she could distinctly see the two heads far out beyond the Cove, rising on the crests of the waves, disappearing in the troughs. The sharp morning sun glinted on those heads, black and gold.

"John," said Gerry in a voice vibrating with terror. "They're Mr. Veers and Mr. Loring—I know they are!"

The little man did not believe her, but Gerry refused to listen to him. Intuition, coupled with the knowledge that Miss Margaret's two male boarders had gone to the Cove, convinced her.

"What'll happen?" she asked wildly.

"Looks kind of bad, miss. If they can't get back to the Cove they'll be carried on to these here cliffs—and they ain't pretty to get dashed against."

"But, John, can't the lifeguard at Pelican Point help them?"

"If they miss the point, head on, and pass close enough alongside he might throw out that rock-resister lifebelt that's anchored to the big reel. But the guard ain't there. He came off an hour ago."

"Oh, but we can get him! We've got to get him!"

"Not time, miss—see that! Lord love you—what a sea!"

A mighty wave had carried the two bobbing heads completely out of range of the Cove. Rapidly it was sweeping them on toward Pelican Point.

"John," Gerry screamed above the wind, "we've got to help—whether they're friends or strangers, we've got to help!"

"Gosh, miss—that's the bunk. You'd be washed out to sea if you tried to make the Point—"

But his last words—his subsequent shouts—were lost on Gerry. Like a mad nymph she was racing toward the narrow, partly submerged chain of rocks called Pelican Peninsula.

Fortunately her canvas shoes were rubber soled. She slipped, she scraped her knees, she cut her hands till the blood streamed from them, she watched her chance between waves and dashed across the lowest rocks, sliding on sea anemones and kelp. After a hundred breathless escapes she reached the life station—in time to see a wave dash the two struggling swimmers head on toward the point.

Her despairing cry was lost in the wind. When she gained courage to open her eyes she saw that the sea had played a prank. It had tossed one swimmer a little to the right and the other a little to the left of the frothing point. Plainly she could identify them —Jig on the right, Bunty on the left. With the next wave they would be swept on toward the growling cliffs.

ALMOST on the lip of the point was a patented device the lifeguard had once explained to her—a wide, deeply padded belt attached by a long rope to a spring reel that would tighten and play out against the pressure of the tide. With this belt a man had a chance to battle the rocks and ease himself between breakers on to the peninsula.

Gerry rushed to it. It was as heavy as lead, but she tore it loose, dragged it to the left of the point, and flung it with all her might.

"Catch it, Bunty—catch it!" she screamed in a faint lull of the inrushing tide.

Then she covered her face with her hands. It would kill her to see that gallant dark-haired toreador, who had fenced so gamely with the bull, miss out against the sea and rocks.

But Bunty didn't miss. With the next wave he made his landing and, limping, dragged himself across the narrow peninsula. Still clinging to the belt he ran out, chest-deep, on the shelving rocks at the other side.

Just in time he caught Jig by the foot as that mighty athlete rushed past on the second wave. Together they struggled to safety, and then both collapsed at Gerry's feet.

When Bunty opened his eyes the lifeguard had returned to his station and was pouring brandy down Jig's throat. Bunty had already received a similar treatment. He lay with his tired head against Gerry's frantic little shoulder, and in overpowering amazement listened to her monologue:

"Don't die, Bunty—don't you dare to die! I love you, dear—it's you—it's really *you* I love, Bunty, darling. Oh, why couldn't I have known it all along...!

"Bunty, I thought I'd die when I saw you drowning out there—I knew then it was you. My Bunty—so sweet and tender and strong and gallant and gay! It burst on me like a clap of thunder. Oh, darling, don't die—I just couldn't bear it!"

"I haven't the least intention," gurgled Bunty, "of doing anything so sappy—not now. Gerry, say it again, will you? Keep on saying it—all that—over and over—I can't believe—"

Then a great chattering party of rescuers arrived with ropes to keep them from falling off slippery rocks, and Bunty and Jig and Gerry were shepherded back to the mainland.

TWO hours and plenty of hot blankets and attention make quite a difference. Bunty, seated in a warm bathrobe before a roaring fire, his heart in giddy flames of anticipation—for Gerry was to be allowed in presently—declared that he felt like a beautiful sunflower, though the doctor

and his assistant looked askance at the simile.

Jig, having swallowed too much Pacific, was not doing quite so well, though there was no doubt of his recovery. Gerry, on her way to Bunty, opened Jig's door by mistake on a sight that was not intended for her eyes.

Maida, kneeling by the bed, held Jig's great form clasped in her arms.

"I don't care who you are or what you are." Maida was weeping over him. "I'm mad about you, Jig. No one could ever take your place. Traveling secretary or Ray Veers—always remember, it's you, the man, I love. Get well, Jig—it's all I ask."

And Gerry, hastily withdrawing, concluded that after that outburst Jig would have no further hesitation in knowing where his heart belonged.

But here was Bunty waiting for her before the fire. As soon as she appeared he sprang up, threw off his blankets, and took her masterfully to his heart.

"Gerry, did you mean all that—all you said out there on the rocks?"

"Every word," she told him, "and a lot more with ruffles on it. Wasn't I a dumb-bell not to know it before—the first time I saw you?"

"Girl of mine—you had me all chewed up with woe—and then you saved my life and trimmed me with festoons of joy. Brave, high-hearted Gerry—why, oh why—"

"Because—well, for one thing, you seemed so young, dear."

"So young! Good Gosh, I'm twenty-eight!"

"Are you really, Bunty? No one would ever believe it. And, another thing, I was dazzled by Jig's fame—his great position—"

Bunty looked as though he were still roaming round Pelican Point. "Jig's great position—"

"Yes, dear. Such a world famous explorer and all that. I suppose it appeals to silly girls like me. But now I know it was silly, Bunty. It's not the great Ray Veers, but his blessed secretary that I love. And how I love him, Bunty dear!"

From being lost at sea Bunty here slid down a whirlpool. When he came up he was still choking a little.

"Great Scott, Holy Mackintosh, and Sweet Cyanide—you funny girl! I feel like a man picking daisies off a lamp-post."

He kissed Gerry's soft hair, her eyes and cheeks and chin. He burrowed his face in her neck and kissed her warm throat—while Gerry thrilled and thrilled and thrilled.

"You funny girl!" he repeated. "The way I've wanted to do this! Look here—is it true? Do you love me just because I'm me?"

"Isn't that a good enough reason?"

"I hope so, but—as a matter of fact you've got your wires crossed, sweetheart. I *am* Ray Veers."

For an instant she couldn't quite take it in. Her great wondering eyes shone up at him.

"Before my brain turns to Charlotte Russe, Bunty, explain this. You said you and Jig had changed names—I have a picture of Jig with your name on it—"

"Sure Jig and I changed names—about a year ago! That was when they snapped that picture—only they learned their mistake and it was never reproduced."

"Bunty!"

"Yes. You see, darling, I hate all the fuss and everything, so I fixed it up with poor old Jig to take my place for a week's holiday at Coronado. Only it

didn't work because Jig's even more bashful that I am—in fact, compared with him I'm a mild experiment. Gosh, but he had an awful time—only I'm tired of talking of him and me. Let's talk of no one but you, Gerry—the first girl I've ever loved. ... Think, dear, I never forgot you from the time you tripped into my arms at Coronado. ..."

She tried to say something, but could think of nothing sensible. Her world had done a somersault. After all her struggles with honor what a trick she had played Maida! Not that it mattered now—Maida loved Jig, famous or unknown. Then, too, Bunty was kissing his girl long and thoroughly—this time on her pretty lips that whispered words of love to her man.

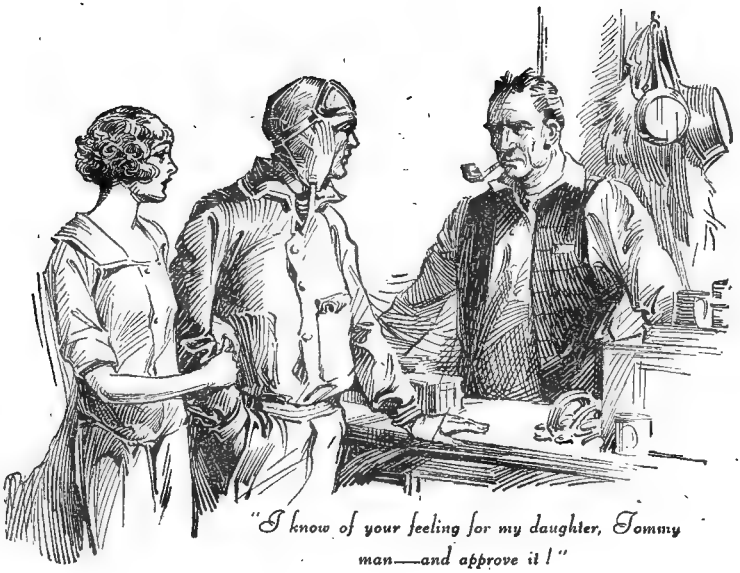
Love's Moment

TO yield would be more easy,
To let my head slip back
And feel your kisses on my mouth,
The kisses that I lack.

And too, the way I'm choosing
May be the unholy one
Of wearing thistles in my heart
In pride of martyrdom.

Yet—in a burst of bravery,
If I dare hesitate,
May I not miss the perfect love,
The love for which I wait?

—*Barbara Kaye*



"I know of your feeling for my daughter, Tommy man—and approve it!"

Hawk's Mate

Tommy told her about the great birds. "They mate, you know, and after that they fight for each other to the death." When the biggest moment of her life was upon her—

By J. U. Giesy

ON a sun kissed ledge of rock that jutted into the waters of a tiny, forest rimmed lake, Joan Gregor was sitting. In the picture of sky and trees and water, she was the only visible bit of animate life. But she fitted into it completely. She was dark, as slenderly, almost unconsciously graceful as any creature of the wild. Indeed, save for a few years of outside schooling, she was a product of the wild herself.

From the lake, a little stream led down to the mighty river where the fur trading post, of which her father was factor, had been built a great many years before. Joan had been born at that post, had grown up there, lived there until after her mother's death. Then her father had sent her to an aunt, and for three years she had known the outside world.

And now she was back again and waiting for the "smoke hawk," as she had formed the habit of waiting for him since the day when she had met him first.

It was of that first meeting she was thinking this afternoon. She had been sitting on this selfsame ledge of rock. And he had roared up over the pines and descended upon the waters of the little lake as gracefully as a homing eagle, had taxied as close to the ledge as he dared, stood up in the cockpit of the hydroplane he controlled with such a complete assurance, and smiled.

"Hello! I'm 'smoke hawk,' otherwise Tommy Remsen. Who are you?"

Joan had understood. A "smoke hawk" was one of the keen eyed men who flew their planes over the vast reaches of the forests looking for—smoke, in order that the fires of which it was an indication might be controlled and countless feet of virgin timber conserved. And so she nodded as she answered:

"I'm Joan Gregor." She never thought of withholding the information. It wasn't the way of the north.

"Donald Gregor, the post factor, is your father?" Tommy Remsen had queried. "I know him, and I knew he had a daughter. So when I spotted you down here through my glasses, I thought I'd stop. You looked sort of—lonesome." Once more he smiled.

And Joan had returned that smile. There was a clean cut, virile something about the smoke hawk that pleased her fancy. He was like so many of the men of the north, she thought. And somewhat more whimsically she thought that he was really something like a hawk. There was even a slight beak to the nose between his steady, farseeing gray eyes.

"Perhaps—I was," she said.

THAT had been the beginning. Since then Tommy Remsen had formed the habit of dropping down on the little lake whenever he passed that way on the endless circuits of his patrols.

For days he was gone, flying, flying, flying above the limitless stretches of the forests. But—always he came back to that speck of blue water, where Joan Gregor waited for him on a sun touched ledge of rock. It made a splendid landing place for his plane, and it lent to their meetings a touch of privacy they might not have attained had he landed on the river and sought her at the post.

And they were both of them young—so that those meetings on the shore of the tree-rimmed bit of water came in time to assume the nature of an ever recurring tryst.

For a man and a maid in the wilderness alone are playing with the never failing fires of life. Romance came from that first encounter and the meetings that followed it. Joan Gregor read her destiny as a woman in the clear, gray eyes of her smoke hawk—knew in her heart of hearts that some day she would become the smoke hawk's mate, if he asked.

And she knew that Tommy Remsen loved her. Because Mr. Tommy Remsen took no pains to disguise the fact. Indeed he told her about it with the

calm assurance that marked nearly everything he did—told her that he had come to include her in all his plans since the day he had zoomed up over the pines to find her sitting on that ledge of rock.

"Know anything about hawks?" he asked one afternoon when he sprawled beside her in all his young, lean-flanked length.

"I—know a very nice one," she told him and touched him as she spoke.

"No, but really," he persisted. "There's a lot of them, but the falcons are the best and the gyrfalcons beat the lot. They mate, you know, and after that they'll fight for each other to the death. I remember once seeing such a dog-fight. There was a hen hawk nesting on a ledge, and a tramp came along and attacked her. He dived. But she managed to get into the air and side-slipped away from his attack, and let out a squawk. *Grrrrk! Grrrrk!* A regular call for help. Just where her side kick had been, I don't know, but all at once here he comes like a bullet—just a gray-brown streak. And he takes in the whole picture in a flash. He goes after altitude about sixty miles an hour, banks himself around and comes down on the enemy's tail, wings up—nose diving like a fighting plane. And that other bird just simply exploded when he struck. And that being tended to, Mrs. Hawk goes back to the job of hatching her eggs."

Joan Gregor laughed softly. Her eyes were glinting and her cheeks a trifle flushed. Tommy had mixed up airplane terms with his story of battling birds. But by then she was able to understand what he meant. He had told her a good bit about planes, had taken her up for a few short flights, had even dared her into briefly handling the controls as he crouched above her to guard against any mistake she might make. So that by then she actually felt that she might handle a plane at a pinch, so far as straight flying went.

"But—you're not going to be a 'hawk' always, are you, Tommy?" she asked. And her tone was that of the maid who has found her man and is ready to take her part in the ordering of their mutual lives.

"Not if I can help it," Tommy Remsen grinned. "I had plans even before I met you, and now—I'm even worse. I've developed ambitions. And I'm saving my pennies. You know there's money in this commercial flying racket, darling. I can start in a small way and work up as soon as I've enough to buy a plane of my own. And I want to get into something that will enable me to—support a wife."

IT was of such things that Joan was thinking that afternoon as she waited for him. And then, soaring high above the pines she saw him and stopped thinking of anything at all, save just her smoke hawk himself.

Out of keen young eyes she watched where he flew with the sunlight turning his plane to silver. She heard the whir of the motor cease, saw the nose of the plane slant over and slide down in a perfect glide to the waiting surface of the lake.

It touched in a shower of silver spray. Once more the motor roared. She rose and waved as the smoke hawk taxied across to the rocky ledge and stopped with a wing tip nearly touching the yellow-gray limestone under her feet.

Tommy Remsen crawled out of the cockpit, ran along that wing and leaped lithely to shore.

"Oh, Tommy darling," she cried as the sleeves of his flying jacket went around her—and lifted her lips to his.

"Hello, hawk's mate," he said as he kissed her. He had taken to calling her "hawk's mate" lately. "Want to fly a bit?"

She nodded. Right then she wanted to do practically anything for which he was in the mood. Because she was young and—he was her man and—she loved him very much.

"Perfect," he declared. "High ceiling and wonderful light. I've been watching you through my glasses for miles. Come along, bird girl." He hopped back onto the wing. She followed him, leaping the gap between wing and rock. He caught and steadied her in his arms.

Together they gained the cockpit. Then again the engine roared and the plane shook the silver spray from its pontoons in a glinting shower as it rose. Up and up. The forests were play toys beneath them. To the east was the twisting course of the river. The dot on its bank was the trading post where Joan had opened her baby eyes on life.

"Want to fly her?" Tommy was shouting in her ear.

She nodded, slid into the pilot's seat. Her feet found the rudder controls. Her slender fingers clasped the stick. Smiling, she banked and headed over the post. Below her the Indians, bringing their winter catch of furs for exchange in trade goods, lifted their heads and pointed as she roared down and down on a long slant. Then she put the stick over and the slant became a graceful climb.

Joan Gregor laughed. Always it thrilled her to feel the fabric beneath her respond to the least movement of her hand, the slightest pressure of her foot. There was something about it she was growing more and more to love. Beside her Tommy Remsen, the smoke hawk, coached her with love in his eyes and voice.

She laughed again. Almost it seemed to her that there between heaven and earth they two were riding alone with love. The sun was a flaming glare of golden glory in the west. She drove toward it, went into another long dive, flattened out again and rose.

Her smoke hawk was grinning in approval. "It's got you—hasn't it—got you?" he proclaimed with his lips against her ear.

She nodded, spun a great circle in the air, headed back for the lake. With Tommy's hand over hers to guide it, she went down and splashed, as Mr. Remsen put it, "like a wounded duck."

"But you're getting the hang of it," he added. "You're getting to be some bird yourself."

He taxied to the ledge of rock and they went ashore. "I've got to see your father," Tommy announced. And some intonation in that casual tone drew her dark eyes to his face.

"What about?"

"I've a message for him," he told her. "Picked it up at the last police post where I stopped for gas. They were going to send a patrol, but it's fifty miles. I told 'em I'd save 'em the trouble. So—I guess we'd better walk down till I see him, and then I'll be hopping off."

JOAN nodded. Without exactly knowing why, she was not satisfied. Not but that she believed what Tommy told her, but that she felt he knew more concerning the police message than he *had* told her.

"Is something wrong?" she inquired.

The smoke hawk's eyes twinkled. "Do you know there are times when I wonder whether you're an intuitive young woman, or just plain curious about things?" he laughed.

"Then there *is* something wrong?"

"Not here," he rejoined. "But—I suppose you've got to know it. The police got a rather funny report over the radio last night. It seems somebody's been raiding the fur posts to the east of here—dropping down on 'em in a plane, taking their pick of the winter take, and flying off. As far as is known there's only two of them. But as their plane carries a Browning gun, and the posts aren't armed, they've got away with it twice in the last ten days, and the Company's asked the police to warn all posts to be on their guard."

Joan Gregor frowned. Remsen's words painted a vivid picture in her brain. Raised as she had been in the northland, the situation was easy for her to understand. Here in this thinly populated region—where the posts of the Company which her father served were scattered over the scope of an empire to catch the patronage of the Indian inhabitants and establish a market for the fruits of their trapping—what she had just heard sounded a bit too plausible for her comfort of mind. And in these days when so large a per cent of mankind were turning to banditry rather than work, the only strange thing about it was that it had not been done before. For in every post from east to west, there were furs that were literally worth their weight in gold.

"But how can they?" she asked.

"And that's a question." The smoke hawk shrugged. "They've all the advantage, of course. Nobody knows who they are and they can hit wherever they like. The Company's offering a reward for 'em dead or alive and all we smoke hawks are asked to watch out for any strange planes and report. Come on down to the post."

Joan nodded. What next, she asked herself? For years the Royal Police had rules this iron land with a hand of steel, till the fear of the law they represented had been driven into the souls of whites and savages alike. But now the Royal must needs take to the air as well as to horses and their red and gold launches that patrolled the watery highways on the King's service!

At Tommy's side she walked in silence down the forest aisles to the clearing on the river which marked the spot of her birth.

Sunlight filled it. Indians stalked or lounged about it. On the banks of the river she saw the canoes drawn up, empty, in which they had brought their bales of fur for trade.

The post itself was built of logs—low buildings, heavily fashioned of native timber; the store, the storage huts, her father's house.

"You'll stay for supper?" she invited as they made their way toward the former structure.

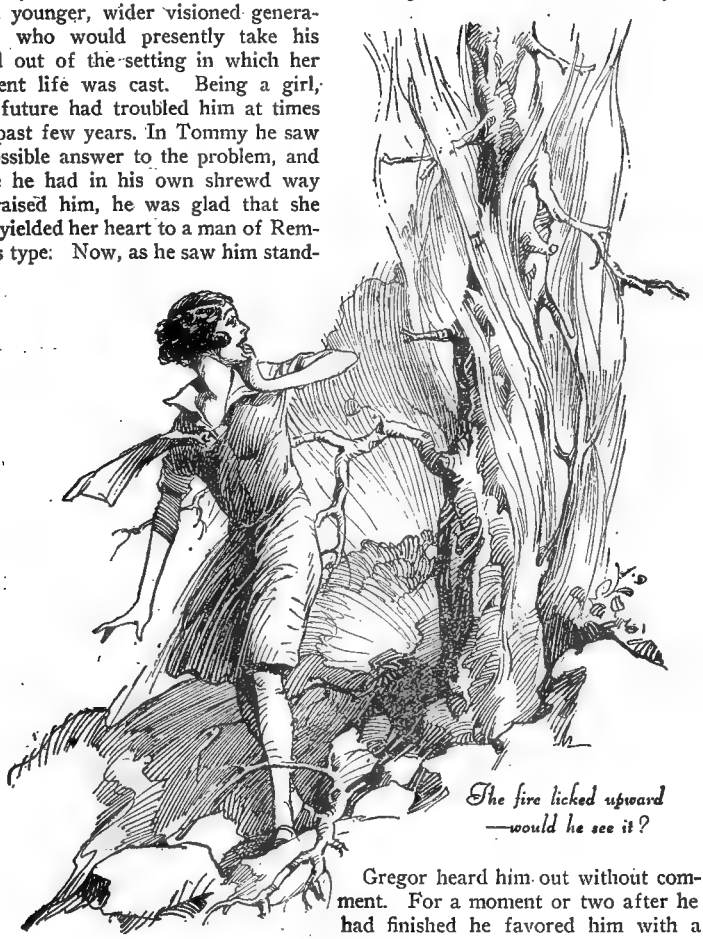
"I might if you asked me," Tommy Remsen grinned as they stepped through its door.

DONALD GREGOR glanced toward them as they entered. He stood back of a rude counter, wrapping a bundle of trade goods for an Indian who stolidly waited beside an opened bundle of furs.

"Father, here's Tommy Remsen," Joan said.

"Welcome, man Tommy," Gregor gave the smoke hawk greeting. He was heavy set, heavy boned, graying,

a Scotsman who had not married until in his thirties and hence was now past middle age. But he approved of Tommy Remsen. In him he saw one of a younger, wider visioned generation, who would presently take his child out of the setting in which her present life was cast. Being a girl, her future had troubled him at times the past few years. In Tommy he saw a possible answer to the problem, and once he had in his own shrewd way appraised him, he was glad that she had yielded her heart to a man of Remsen's type. Now, as he saw him standing lithely straight beside her, the thought occurred to him that they had come to him on a romantic mission.



The fire licked upward —would he see it?

"Were the two of you wantin' to see me?" he asked.

"I was," the smoke hawk replied, and explained the situation briefly.

Gregor heard him out without comment. For a moment or two after he had finished he favored him with a frowning regard. "Air bandits," he said then, slowly. "You're no jokin'?"

"I'm merely telling you what the sergeant told me. I promised to give

you the message," Tommy Remsen shrugged.

"An'—we're to be on our guard?" Gregor considered as the Indian gathered up his trade goods and stalked out. "But—how can we, man Remsen, if they come at us out of the air with machine guns?" His lips twitched into a somewhat grim smile. Then as his glance shifted to his daughter the smile faded out. "We've no means of resistin' that sort of attack."

"Hardly," Tommy assented. "You're not a fort."

"Tommy's staying for supper, father," Joan announced.

"A'right—a'right." The factor nodded. "Go make your arrangements, lass."

His eyes followed her departing figure and came back to Remsen. "I dinna like the thought of it," he said in the tone and manner of one who thinks aloud. "Were it not for her, I'd no be especially troubled. But she complicates the situation, you'll admit."

The smoke hawk nodded. His own eyes were dark with a speculative light. "I'm not overlooking the fact, Mr. Gregor," he agreed. "It's the sort you can't overlook. And there's no telling what to expect from the sort of men who are pulling this stunt. But you know how I feel about Joan, I think?"

"An' approve of it, man Remsen," Joan's father assented tersely.

The smoke hawk's features lighted. "I'm glad of that," he said. "I've been meaning to speak to you about it. But here's what I'm getting at. Two days ago they cleaned up at the Fort Laird station two hundred miles to the east. But that's nothing to them the way they move. So—I'm going to arrange my work so I can circle back past here on a fairly regular schedule the next few days. They've got to work by daylight thanks to the nature of the country, and—I'll work out some sort of signal with Joan in case they attack your post. There's a dead pine over near the lake, and with a can of kerosene it ought to make a beacon I could spot for miles if somebody could light it. Then I could possibly notify the police and get on the job myself."

"Aye. You could try it." Gregor nodded, drew a short black pipe, filled it and set it alight. "Yet what could you do wi' that plane o' yours against theirs armed as 'tis said it is?"

Tommy grimaced. "I don't know," he confessed. "If I had a sub-machine gun—or something of the sort—"

"You've talked it over wit' Joan?" Gregor questioned.

"No." Tommy shook his head. "But I will before I leave."

AND he did. After supper, in the late northern twilight, she went with him again to the lake. And there the smoke hawk pointed to the dead pine.

"That's it," he said. "Cache a can of kerosene at its base and then if anything happens, light it or get one of the Indians to light it. I'm going to stick around in this neighborhood. And if you pour oil on the trunk, that old fellow will shoot a column of smoke a hundred feet straight up. And that's the sort of thing a smoke hawk's watchin' for all the time. Of course nothing at all may happen. These birds may pass you up, or they may be grabbed before it comes your turn. But—it won't hurt to be ready, an' if they *should* take a notion to make you a call, you light that pine and I'll spot it."

"Like the gyrfalcon that came when his mate was attacked and—called him," Joan Gregor smiled.

"Yes, hawk's mate," the smoke hawk said and drew her into his arms. His face was very tender and all his love was in his voice: "Oh, Joan dearest, do you know what it means to me when I call you that? I don't want to alarm you. But one can't tell what their sort will do—if they get the chance. And—I love you so very much! Be careful, and be sure that I'll be somewhere around in case you need me. I'm going down to the Mountie station to-night and have a talk with the sergeant—see if I can't arrange to get some sort of gun to put teeth into my old bus."

"Oh, I'll be all right," Joan told him with an assurance she in nowise felt. As a matter of fact she was troubled by what she had heard, and the manner in which the information had been accepted by both the smoke hawk and her father. Neither were timid men. If they viewed the situation as it appeared they did, she knew that they felt a danger threatened. And she knew very well what that danger might be for a girl like herself.

But she was the child of the one and the sweetheart of the other, and the daughter of a race that had never balked danger from either the elements or their fellow man.

"Don't worry about me, Tommy dear," she went on. "If I see anything that looks like this robber plane, I'll manage to set fire to this old pine tree. Or—" her lips quirked in a whimsical fashion, "maybe, while they're robbing the post, I'll manage to slip out and steal their plane!"

"Don't you try anything foolish," the smoke hawk said. And his voice was almost stern. "If you see anything like a strange plane, duck for cover, light that pine and keep yourself out of sight till I come. Now I've got to hop off if I want to make the Mountie post before it's too dark to get down." He kissed her almost fiercely and sprang to the wing of his plane.

But he was back again the next morning to report a failure in his plan for getting a gun. "They haven't a thing down there but rifles and belt guns, to begin with," he explained. "And after that they don't seem very air minded. The sergeant's idea seemed to be that if you lighted the pine, I should fly over and tell them about it, and let them take the job off my hands. A fat chance they'd have of making a go of it in their pretty red launch, and I told him so. Told him I'd notify him of course if I wasn't too far off when I saw your signal, and if I was I'd try to handle it myself."

"But, Tommy, what can you do against an armed plane?" Joan protested.

"Nothing," he told her without the least hesitation. "Not a thing. And I don't intend to try it. I'm going to fly down to Edmonton an' get a gun. And I'm on my way now. Be back day after to-morrow. I just stopped to tell you." He chatted a few minutes longer and hopped off.

SHE waited and watched, and nothing happened except that the police launch stopped at the post and Donald Gregor told her that another post had been robbed two days before.

On the third day she heard the drum of a motor about noon, and ran out and saw the smoke hawk coming down. She ran to meet him through the forest and he took her into his arms.

"Back again, hawk's mate," he said and kissed her. "Anything happened?"

"No." She shook her head. "But they've held up a post to the west of us, Tommy. Did you get that gun?"

"Sure," he nodded, grinning. "The gun and plenty of ammunition. If those birds take a notion to buzz around here, I'll be able to hand them a surprise."

With his arm about her he walked down to the post for a chat with Gregor. Joan gave the two men lunch and Tommy flew away north.

Thereafter, as the days went by, the smoke hawk haunted the district, sweeping day after day above the forests in wide circuits that brought him back to the tiny lake beyond the fur post once in the span of each twenty-four hours.

On the afternoon of the fourth day, Joan hearing the drum of a motor and ran out of her father's house to find an airplane riding high above the river to the south.

At sight of it, her heart throbbed heavily once and took up a faster beating. She lifted a hand and pressed it to her heart. That was not Tommy Remsen's plane! To begin with Tommy never approached the post from that direction, and more, she had come to know his plane by sight. Was it the robber plane? she asked herself, as she stood with back-tilted head to mark its steady advance. If it passed over, well and good. But—if it—stopped—

And it *was* stopping. Abruptly the hum of its engine died. Its nose tipped over and down. It was coming down on the river.

Joan wasted no further time. Her father, too, had heard the motor. He stood in the door of the store as she turned. On flying feet she reached him, cried that the moment they had dreaded was at hand, that she was going to light the beacon as Tommy had told her to do, thrust quickly searching fingers into the pocket of his coat and drew out a handful of the matches with which he was always supplied.

For an instant she stood inside the grip of his arms and kissed him. Then she was off.

Yet at the edge of the clearing she paused. She wanted to be sure—wanted to make no mistake. Screened by the pines she glanced back at the river, where the plane had now come down. Close to the bank it floated. Faintly she heard one of the two men it carried shouting to the Indians who clustered on the shore. And then—with a little gasp of comprehension, she saw a machine gun mounted on the fuselage, saw that the men held rifles in their hands!

She waited no longer. Turning, she ran to the foot of the dead pine. The can of kerosene sat there. Quickly she unscrewed its top and lifted it up to pour its inflammable contents over the tinder dry bark.

When the can was emptied to the last drop, she set it aside and struck a match, holding its tiny flare against the oil filmed trunk. It caught with a yellow-red flash. Fingers of flame ran swiftly up. The whole circle of the bole broke into a leaping blaze. Above it the lower branches caught. Faster and faster, higher and higher those yellow red fingers reached. Black smoke eddied above them, began to mount. It reached up and up, became a stretching, high flung streamer that rose and rose. Higher and higher, over the tip of the burning pine it lifted and swung and swayed.

Panting, Joan Gregor watched it with wide, strained eyes. It was as though in its swing and sway it beck-

oned, she thought—as though it beckoned the smoke hawk to her. The heat of the fire touched her cheek. She drew back a few paces and waited.

WOULD he see it—would he see it? The question seemed hammered out by each throbbing beat of her heart. Would the eagle keen eyes of her smoke hawk mark that mounting pillar of smoke where it swung and swayed?

She strained her ears for sounds from the post behind her, from the skies above her head—a sound of shots that would mark violence on the part of the fur thieves against her father, the drum of a motor that would herald the swift response of the man she loved, as he drove on wide spread wings to her aid.

Ten, fifteen minutes passed. Higher and higher the column of dark smoke rose, more and more fiercely the dead pine blazed. Twenty minutes—a half hour. Hope faltered in Joan Gregor's heart. Why, why, didn't her smoke hawk answer? Why didn't he come as he had promised? She began sobbing, hard, dry, wracking, tearless sobs that shook her as she stood.

And then—she heard it—the sound of which she had despaired. Flying so low that the heavy pontoons of his plane nearly brushed their tops, Tommy Remsen swept over the rim of the trees, flashed down to the lake, tore in a half concealing cloud of spray across it toward the jutting ledge of rock.

Her breath still sobbing in her throat, Joan ran toward that meeting point.

And catching sight of her flying figure, Tommy rose in the cockpit, and waved an arm in greeting.

But Joan did not pause. She ran straight across the top of the rocky ledge, sprang from it to the wing of the plane and stumbled toward him.

"Oh—Tommy—Tommy—you did come, didn't you, Tommy!" she half laughed, half wept as she swung herself over its edge and the smoke hawk caught her panting body in his arms. "I was so afraid—you wouldn't see—the smoke. But—you did, you darling old—smoke hawk—just as you said you would! Tommy—they're here—at the post!"

"Any violence?" Remsen questioned, and kissed her gasping mouth and held her for just a moment against his heart.

"No—I don't think so." She shook her head. "Dad knew our—plans, and—there hasn't been any shooting. I—listened."

"Their plane's on the river?" the smoke hawk asked.

"Yes." Joan nodded. "They made our Indians moor it—threatened them with—guns."

"Then, listen," the smoke hawk decided. "You get back ashore and keep under cover. I'm going to fly over there and see if I can put that crate of theirs out of commission. If I succeed that will hold them long enough for me to come back here, get you and take you down to the Mountie post and then come back after these babies in the police launch."

Joan Gregor eyed him. "And—just how do you expect to do all that?" she inquired.

"Why—I'll flop down beside 'em—shoot off their fins and rudder an' cut a few struts maybe with my gun." Mr. Remsen grinned. "It's something more than a toy." He turned, produced the Thompson sub-machine gun and stood with it balanced in his hands.

"All right." His companion nodded. "Let's get at it. I'm going along."

"Like fun you are," the smoke hawk protested.

"Like fun I am," Joan asserted. "I can handle the plane while you work the gun."

"But see here. These birds may not exactly take to my notion." The smoke hawk frowned. "They probably heard me come down here, and if I'm going to get away with it, I can't waste time."

"Then stop wasting it," Joan suggested. "Hop off whenever you're ready, because—Tommy"—her dark eyes met his gray ones and held them—"I'm going along."

"I suppose," said Mr. Remsen, "that you know I could put you ashore."

"Of course." Joan's eyes were shining and suddenly she laughed. "Of course you could, Tommy. But—you'd only waste more time. Because—I'd fight, hawk man of mine."

"Oh, well—have it your own way." Mr. Remsen slid into the pilot's seat and shrugged. "But after I bring this bus down on the river, if those thugs start shootin', you lift her whether I've managed to shoot up their crate or not. I'm not going to have you shot." He started the motor, sent the plane down the lake at a swiftly mounting speed and rose.

UP and up. They were above the trees, banking, circling toward the post. Below them it showed in fore-shortened proportion. And beyond it the other plane rode on the river, held to the bank by a mooring rope.

So much Joan saw as the smoke hawk drove the hydroplane toward the channel of the northward rolling flood. And suddenly she caught her breath. Below her she saw the post Indians standing with lifted faces, pointing. And too she saw other men running swiftly toward the plane itself, saw them reach it, saw one of them begin a frantic fumbling with its moorings, while his companion scrambled aboard.

"Tommy!" she cried.

The smoke hawk nodded. His face had set into tense lines of speculation. He spun a wide circle above the river.

"Do you—suppose they're—running away?" Joan shouted with her mouth beside his ear.

"I don't know." She caught his answer above the roar of the motor. "But at least they're—coming up."

Beneath them the other plane quivered into motion, swept up on a long altitude-searching slant to the north.

Tommy Remsen drew back on the stick and went higher as he watched with a deepening frown between his brows.

Then—the lower plane banked and turned back, still rising.

"Thought so," the smoke hawk growled. There was trouble in his eyes. "I've an idea we've a battle on our hands. Those chaps fancy us unarmed and they're coming up to get us."

"But—can't we—get them?" Joan Gregor asked.

Admiration was in the glance the smoke hawk shot her. "Hawk's mate," he said. "It's a good name for you, Joan. I guess that's about our only chance. It's up to us to keep above them. Take her and keep her up, while I show 'em we've got teeth."

He let her slide into the pilot's seat and picked up his gun. Leaning over the edge of the fuselage, he stared down at the other plane.

It was still rising. "Go—up!" the smoke hawk shouted.

Joan drew back on the stick, felt the plane tilt to a higher climbing angle, that changed its relative relation to the other machine, gave her a fleeting glimpse of the fur thieves crouched in their cockpit.

Then they flashed beneath her and Tommy Remsen fired down upon them. She heard the rat-tat-tat, of the gun and his following admonition: "Quick! Bank her an' keep her nose up! If they get above us, we're gone!"

She nodded, thrust her foot on the rudder bar and juggled her ailerons. In a wide curve she came about and found the other plane still at a lower level and turning also. She drove toward it with set jaws and every nerve and muscle in her body tense.

Yet oddly she was not exactly afraid. Rather a strange exhilaration had taken hold upon her. As she drove toward the outlaw plane, one part of her mind was intently fastened upon the demands of the instant, another was painting pictures in her brain.

Hawk's mate, the smoke hawk had called her. And the words in her heart were like a stimulant to keep it strong. Here was experience, adventure, she told herself. Here was a test of skill and courage and individual morale. These huge mechanical birds which men had devised were like birds indeed, circling in an aërial combat, juggling for position, each intent on the destruction of the opponent with whom its battle was joined.

The lower plane was charging swiftly toward her. Straining her eyes, she caught sight of the machine gun with which it was armed. A heart beat followed her perception of it pointed in her direction, and then she saw its blunt nose spit smoke and flame.

She started to cry out, choked back the exclamation at a sound not unlike raindrops pattering on the body of her plane. Only they were not raindrops. They were bullets!

Behind her, over the hum of her motor, she heard Tommy Remsen groan.

BRIEFLY she jerked her head around. Her heart faltered, seemed for a moment to stop in her breast, and then resumed its beating with a force that drove the blood into her ears in roaring waves of sound.

Tommy Remsen was sagged with his head and arms over the edge of the cockpit and—the gun had fallen from his hands! He had been hit. That burst of machine gun fire had struck him.

"Tommy!" she screamed and—he did not answer.

Emotions such as she had never known before exploded in Joan Gregor's brain. They were like a sudden sheet of flame. Before them every thought, every scrap of education and training, every characteristic save only primitive instincts of life went down. At sight of that sagging figure she became the hawk's mate he had called her—the hawk's mate whose mate had been struck down.

These outlaws had done this thing and now she rode against them in an unarmed plane. There was that story Tommy Remsen had told her—about the gyrfalcon whose mate had been assailed. He had come to her relief and—what had he done? He had gone up and dived on his opponent!

With set lips and hard dark eyes she banked her plane around. Altitude, she told herself—altitude was the thing. In a wide circle above the river she sought to gain it, driving the quivering thing that carried both hers and

the smoke hawk's unconscious body up and up.

Once more the other plane was rushing at her, but her circle swung her past it. It fired upon her again but missed. And now she knew exactly what she wanted. She wanted, as Tommy would have expressed it, to get on the tail of this murdering thing and then hawklike, like the gyrfalcon in his story, swoop upon it, strike it, drive it down and down and down to the wide waters of the river.

The thought was madness. Yet to her it seemed her only chance. To continue as she was would be madness also—a madness to which there could be but one possible end. But—if she could hurl the heavy pontoons of her plane upon the other, strike it, crush a wing, she could, she felt, destroy it, exact a deadly revenge.

She banked quickly. The other plane once again below her was also coming around. With a wide throttle she flashed over it and turned. And now she had it before her and again she fought for altitude. Up and up, but always behind it she roared, following where it circled, matching its every twist and trick with one of her own. And to her it appeared that the men who drove it began to understand, began an endeavor to shake her off.

But she refused to be shaken. Above and behind it, always above and behind it, she soared, with hard eyes watching for the moment of her planned attack. Seemingly puzzled by her actions, it suddenly straightened out and roared away beneath her. She put the nose of the hydroplane over and opened her throttle wide and—went down!

Through the windshield she saw the wide expanse of the river—the sunlight glinting on the wide stretched wings of the machine at which she charged. Faster and faster she swept toward it, closer and closer as the force of gravity was added to the drag of the whirling propeller. The air was a shrieking thing among the struts. A heartbeat or two—scant time for a half uttered prayer and—she struck, full on those other glinting wings!

Sometimes when a hawk makes its kill it drives its talons so deeply into the body of its victim that it cannot release them. And it was so with Joan Gregor, hawk's mate, then. The heavy right hand pontoon not only crumpled the wing of the plane beneath it, but became entangled with it, so that although the pull of the engine still swept Joan's plane forward, it carried a trailing load. The engine of the smoke hawk's plane had not been fashioned for any such demands. As a result the nose of Joan's plane tilted still more sharply downward, and, locked together, both machines began to drop.

Joan kept her head. Though she knew she was falling swiftly into the river, her spirit was lifted to the clouds. The murderous pair against whom she had battled were still beneath her, would reach the water first. She used every trick the man she loved had taught her to maintain that position to the last. With rudder and wing she fought as she swirled ever lower and lower. And then—she struck!

SHE struck in a blinding shower, lifted about her by her impact, struck and sank till the edge of the cockpit was awash. But there the hydroplane, still weighted by the other machine now deep below the surface, floated.

Joan rose unsteadily to her feet, turned to seize Tommy Remsen by the

shoulders and lift his head to her heart and turn her eyes toward the post.

Already Indians were clustered about their drawn up canoes. She saw her father pointing as though in mute direction and waved an arm to him in a demanding signal for help. Then a canoe and another and another—a regular flotilla of canoes were in the water. She saw them flashing toward her, glanced down at the man whose body she held against hers and—Tommy Remsen, his face adrip with bloodstained water, opened his eyes.

"Wha — what — happened?" he mumbled and struggled to rise.

"Tommy—keep still till the canoes get here. Don't rock the boat." Joan Gregor kissed him and laughed with the sound of a sob in her throat. "Oh —Tommy—where did they hit you?"

"Head, I think," the smoke hawk told her. "At least—it hurts."

Later after they were ashore and the jagged wound in her lover's scalp had been dressed, they talked it over.

Joan explained exactly what she had done and Tommy nodded in comprehension and winced. But the arm he had drawn about her tightened and his eyes held the light a man's eyes should hold for only one woman on earth. When he finally spoke, his voice was very soft and just a trifle awed.

"What you did was the maddest, bravest, darlingest thing I ever heard of a girl's doing, hawk's mate. And of course, it was your only chance. But —what made you think of it, darling?"

"That story you told me—about the gyrfalcon whose mate was attacked," Joan confessed. "They'd shot you, Tommy. I—was afraid you might—be dead. And I couldn't seem to think of anything else—after that. So I tried to do what you said he did—go up and come down on our enemy from above. I did it, Tommy—I succeeded. Aren't you glad?"

"Yeah," said Mr. Tommy Remsen. "But see here—I owe you my life! And I always try to pay my debts. So as far as my life is concerned, it's yours. If you want it, that is. Will you take it, hawk's mate, and—let me share it with you?"

And Joan Gregor nodded. Her eyes were brooding and her voice was a quivering song of love.

"Hawk's mate," she repeated and laid her cheek to his. "Oh, hawk-man, dear, don't you know I'd rather be just that, than—anything else in the world?"

A moment later, with his mouth on hers, he knew it was so for all time. Each had found their mate. And their love would last until death.

It was a different Flora who looked back from the mirror that night

Flora's Kodak Knight

She never would get a man, Flora thought. How did other girls do it? Vacation was nearly over and she had nothing to tell!

By Barbara Bliss

"WHY in the world," Ruth Tomlinson asked lazily as she stretched her slim length on the beach, "did they name you Flora MacDonald?"

The girl addressed stopped digging in the sand with hands as brown as a boy's and looked intently at the speaker.

"You mean," she inquired, "why

did they name me after the heroine in the old Scotch song?"

"Exactly. Why did they?"

"Because my mother was romantic, I presume," Flora said quietly. "But I'm not sure. She—my mother—died when I was only three." She added: "Do you consider my name particularly inappropriate?"

"Why, no—except that the song you were named for is called 'Flora MacDonald's Lament'—and you don't seem to be the sort of girl who would waste her time lamenting any man."

Flora could feel the warm blood creep up to her tanned cheeks, but she shrugged her shoulders and followed, with seemingly absorbed brown eyes, the flight of a sea gull over the sun-drenched ocean.

She mustn't, she told herself sturdily, let Ruth suspect that she knew just what had been hidden in that last speech. For what Ruth had meant was, "They named you for a girl in a song who was lamenting her lost lover—yet you haven't even a lover to lament."

"Well," Flora thought ironically, "I guess I can lament the fact that I haven't one, can't I?"

"Flora isn't interested in men," Molly Masters, who was sitting tailor-fashion on the beach just beyond Ruth, remarked. "Don't you remember how she was in high school? She never had any time for boys."

"Yes," said Ruth cryptically, "I remember her."

Flora straightened her back in its one-piece green bathing suit, and continued to gaze with seeming absorption out to sea.

"Now," she thought, "what Ruth means is that she remembers me in high school—and remembers, too, that no one could tell whether or not I liked boys because they never bothered with me."

THE three girls had been born in Brooklyn, and they still lived there, working women now. Molly had a small tea room, and Flora was her assistant. Ruth, the beauty of the trio, graced the perfume counter in a New York department store. They had secured their vacations at the same time, and were visiting Anne Conover in Patchogue, Long Island. Anne, before her marriage, had also been a Brooklyn girl, and had gone to school with her visitors.

Ruth and Molly were having a wonderful time. Flora, although she loved to be near the sea, was not so happy as she might have been. There was so much talk of men, men, *men*—everybody's man but hers. She did not have any.

Unlike Molly and Ruth, Flora had not left ardent admirers in Brooklyn; neither did she make any apparent impression on the friends of Anne's husband, who had been promptly summoned to help entertain Anne's guests.

It was not, Flora told herself fiercely, that she pitied herself. She didn't—she *wouldn't!* But somehow she seemed so different from these other girls—like a queer, brown little alien. Molly, with her gorgeous red hair and her laughing eyes; Ruth with her blond beauty; Anne with her sweet serenity, her soft appeal—all of them made to be loved.

And loved they were! Anne was radiantly happy in her marriage. Flora could rejoice over this; sincerely, happily rejoice. Also she was glad that so many men fell in love with Molly. Ruth's popularity, however, was another matter. Flora could not honestly rejoice over that, because Ruth

made less popular girls feel so forlornly and detestably out of things. Ruth was like that. Neither Molly nor Anne were. They both loved Flora, and wanted her to be happy. And yet all three girls were interested in men almost to the exclusion of everything else.

The hard part of it was that Flora was interested in men, too—only she never had anything to report.

Sometimes she longed ardently to be able to repeat something of romantic interest which Jimmy Roberts or Parker Dale or almost *any* man had said to her. With the same intensity she yearned, on occasions, to remark casually that she had just received a box of flowers, a great quantity of candy by parcel post, or an expensive long distance telephone call.

For, after all, Flora was only twenty-two. At twenty-two — and even, alas, at a greater age—things like that matter so tremendously to the daughters of Eve.

"Oh, look, here comes Anne!" Molly exclaimed out of the silence that had fallen on the three girls. "And she has an envelope in her hand. I'll bet she stopped at the drug store and got those kodak pictures I took of the boys yesterday."

It developed that Molly was right. Anne, in a print frock and a wide-brimmed hat, joined them a moment later. She delivered the group of snapshots to Molly and a camera to Flora.

"I thought you might want to take some pictures before you got out of your bathing suits," she told the latter while Molly and Ruth were examining the snapshots.

"Why?" Ruth glanced up from the pictures to inquire. "Who is there here, now, worth wasting film on? Nothing but a lot of women! Still," with languid amusement, "Flora doesn't make portrait studies of men, when you come to think of it."

"She does, too!" Molly loyally asserted. "She's taken some awfully good pictures of the crowd at home."

"Pictures with *men* in them?" Ruth exclaimed in mock amazement. "Oh, Flora, how could you?"

Flora's cheeks were blazing and so were her brown eyes, but she managed to speak with amusement more cool and detached than Ruth's.

"Don't you think I could focus my kodak on a man? Are they supposed to be particularly difficult subjects?"

"*I* have never found them so," said Ruth sweetly.

BY this time Molly was mad.

"Have you ever thought of wearing a blue ribbon with a bell on it instead of a string of beads, Ruth?" she demanded. "Positively I don't know why you don't meow when you try to speak! But the effect is the same as it is. And just let me tell you this: Flora has taken, right on the film in that camera, some shots of a perfectly stunning man. I'm afraid the pictures may not come out, because the light was too strong when we took them, and we found out afterward that, although she had taken snapshots, the kodak was set for a bulb exposure. But you never can tell. The pictures may be good. And anyway, I saw her take them. What's more, the man who posed for them is not only a knock-out, he's simply ga-ga about Flora."

"Who is he?" Ruth asked, with apparently more interest in the unknown than animosity toward the fiery Molly.

As Molly did not reply, Ruth persisted: "Who is he, Flora?"

"Now that," Flora retorted inward-

ly, "is just what I should like to know!" Aloud she said with remote dignity: "You do not know him, Ruth."

"Your tone implies," she was informed, "that if you have anything to do with it I never shall know him."

The brown eyes that Flora fixed upon her were frankly scornful.

"Oh, no," she said emphatically, "you're quite wrong. I was not implying anything of the sort—because, no matter how you may appear to yourself, Ruth, I don't consider you in the least dangerous."

"Atta girl!" Molly applauded. "Hit 'em again!"

"I wouldn't advise her to," Ruth said, her face flushed with anger.

"Oh, come! Stop acting like quarrelsome children," Anne nervously interposed. She added: "Let's go back to the house and play a little bridge before luncheon."

"You go and play three-handed until I come," Flora suggested. "I want another swim."

And so, after a little more discussion, the three girls left Flora on the beach. They had also left, she discovered almost at once, her camera.

Oh, well, let it stay there, she thought listlessly. If some one stole it while she was in the ocean, it would be no great loss. Much use she had for a camera, anyway! Certainly she didn't need one to take pictures of a fascinating man who was simply ga-ga about her!

Good old Molly! What a fiercely loyal friend she was. But what had possessed her to make up that yarn about the snapshots she, Flora, had taken of a mysterious admirer? Now, even though Molly had said that the pictures had been over-exposed, Flora felt that she should produce them. Well, she just couldn't; so that was all there was to it.

As she cut through the waves a few minutes later, with the sun beating down upon her face and dark, drenched hair, Flora wondered why some girls were like her and some like Ruth Tomlinson. More particularly she wondered why some were like her—so totally incapable of making the grade.

It was not, she mused, as though she were ugly. Molly had told her that it was because she was so shy and diffident with men that they believed she didn't like them. Perhaps Molly was right—but there just didn't seem to be anything to do about it. And, anyway, it was now time to go back to the cottage.

As she splashed out of the water, Flora glanced up the beach for her kodak. She could not see it; but it seemed quite probable that it was hidden from view by the man who had stretched himself full length on the sand right where she had been sitting.

Approaching him somewhat hesitantly, she noted that he was a remarkably well-built man. His shoulders and limbs, exposed by his bathing suit, were a deep, warm brown. He might, as he lay there motionless on the sand, have been carved from bronze.

Then, pausing beside him, Flora saw that he was asleep. What a strong, attractive, vital creature he was — and how arrestingly handsome! His features, like his body, might have been chiseled from bronze.

Suddenly an idea that seemed nothing short of an inspiration took possession of Flora. She noted swiftly that the man was lying on his side with his head propped on his arm. If one

didn't actually know that he was sleeping, one might suppose that he was just looking down at the sand...

If she could find her kodak, and take a picture of him, she might, after all, be able to substantiate Molly's story! For if only she had a picture of this gorgeous creature she could show it to the girls. Then, at least, Ruth could never tell her again that she hadn't even a snapshot of a man.

She glanced eagerly around for her camera, and, with a sigh of relief, saw it lying only a short distance away.

Was the sun right? Yes, thank Heaven, it was shining directly in the man's face!

A minute later she was kneeling in the sand, about ten feet from her victim, focussing her kodak, and searching for him in its finder.

Oh, there he was! Yes, from this distance she could get a full length picture of him. And it was going to be great.

Click! The picture was taken!

But perhaps, Flora debated, she should take another. Why not? Yes, of course she should. If she needed pictures of a man to prove the truth of Molly's story, she should take all she could.

Still on her knees, Flora crawled through the sand a few feet, paused, and again adjusted her camera; again she located the sleeping man in her finder.

Oh, yes, this would be a good place! Only his head and shoulder would be in; but he looked wonderful from this angle—oh, wonderful! And hadn't she been lucky to find him so sound asleep? Talk about the answer to a maiden's prayer—this man was certainly that!

There was a second click of the lever—and a second snapshot was taken.

But that was not all.

Her work completed, Flora turned satisfied and grateful brown eyes upon her subject—and met in return a pair of intensely blue eyes that looked quizzically back at her!

The man was awake! He had seen her take that last snapshot of him!

FOR a terrible space of time Flora just looked at him; then the kodak dropped from her limp fingers and she sat suddenly back upon the sand, weak with dismay.

The man smiled at her. Even in her confusion Flora noted that he had a singularly delightful smile.

"I never before suspected," he confessed, "that mermaids took kodak pictures."

"Mermaids?" Flora repeated blankly.

"Yes, isn't that what you are? Now don't tell me that you have feet there behind you—for so far I haven't seen any, and they'd be a fearful disappointment to me. I see only a green, helmet-like garment that looks as though it had been made from wet seaweed, skin that the sun has kissed to gold whenever you came to the surface of the ocean, brown hair glistening with water, and brown eyes that are wide and startled at sight of a mortal. So why shouldn't I think you a mermaid? Particularly as I've always been on the lookout for one."

Flora smiled nervously. Whatever this man was, he was tactful. Having caught her in the act of taking his photograph, he was talking all this nonsense to give her an opportunity to recover her poise. The only trouble was that Flora was not regaining her poise. The knowledge that she must offer some sort of explanation to this man was making her more desperately em-

barrassed each passing minute. What on earth could she say to him? How could she ever give a sensible reason for having wanted his picture? Yet she must say *something*—she just *must*.

Suddenly it seemed to her that she had a veritable inspiration.

"I—I was just using up my film," she explained, somewhat breathlessly. "I want to have it developed this afternoon; and there was only one more picture on it; so I—I just wanted to take *something*... And when I saw you lying there asleep, I—thought you wouldn't mind."

"Mind! I'm honored," the man assured her so gravely that an onlooker would have marveled at him. He added: "I hope, though, that my mouth was closed—otherwise I must have looked like 'something' awful."

"Oh, yes," Flora told him, "your mouth was very tightly closed. I'll prove it by sending the picture to you, if you like—" She paused, brightly flushed and again covered with confusion. Of course, now, he would think she wanted to know his name, wanted to see him again! Oh, how terrible!

But the man, seemingly unaware of her confusion, spoke in a matter of fact tone. "You could send the picture on to Lenox, Massachusetts, to me, if you would, for I'm leaving here to-morrow. My name is Berkeley—Colin Berkeley. I'd write the address, but I haven't a paper or pencil. I'll tell you, though: couldn't you, perhaps, come down to the beach to-night for just a minute? Then I could give it to you—the address, I mean."

Flora stiffened. "Oh, no, I couldn't possibly do that!"

"Well," the man considered the situation, "I would be very glad to leave the address at your house, or hotel, if you will allow me to—but I'm not going to pretend that I want to leave it anywhere and not see you again before I go away, because I do want to see you again, awfully. You're the nearest thing to a mermaid that I've ever come across," he concluded whimsically; "so you don't seem in the least like any girl I've ever met. Naturally, then, I—well, couldn't you come down to the beach to-night just for a few minutes?"

"But I—I don't *know* you," Flora stammered, conscious that a strange feeling, new, half wild, wholly sweet, was creeping over her. Was it, perhaps, exaltation?

Colin Berkeley's smile was reassuring.

"Honestly, I'm not a villain," he told her. "I am a perfectly respectable bachelor, and there isn't a reason in the world why any girl shouldn't walk with me for a few minutes on a beach in the moonlight. Won't you take my word for that, and come?"

"Well, I'll—think about it," Flora said childishly, with her heart beating a mad tattoo against her ribs.

"Please think kindly," Colin begged. "And, meanwhile, won't you tell me your name?"

"It's—Flora MacDonald."

"Oh—ho! Named after the heroine in the old Scotch song, are you? Well, I'll bet you don't go around lamenting your lovers. In the first place, you couldn't lose one of them if you tried, and in the second place, unless I'm much mistaken, you're a flinty-hearted little imp."

Flora's brown eyes were glowing now. This was wonderful. Oh, it was *wonderful!*

Evidently Colin Berkeley thought her positively attractive.

"I must run," she said, rising and dusting the sand from her knees. "They'll be waiting luncheon for me."

Colin sprang to his feet.

"So you're actually not a mermaid after all!" Colin marveled, eying, from beneath quizzical brows, her tiny rubber bathing shoes. "Still," he continued accusingly, "do you call those feet? Why, if you were any bigger than a minute they wouldn't hold you!"

Flora smiled, and it was a smile that no one had ever before seen on her lips. It was sweet and glad and gay—and it was, also, dazzling in its sudden consciousness of power.

"Good-by," she said lightly.

Colin stooped, picked up her kodak, and handed it to her.

"Remember," he urged, "that I shall be waiting here to-night. I shall be waiting until you come."

Again she smiled at him, and ran fleetly up the beach in the direction of Anne's cottage.

THE remainder of that day was like a dream to Flora. She was only half aware of her surroundings, only half awake to realities. Before dinner she dressed in a frock of pale yellow georgette with tiny puffed sleeves and a skirt that seemed to have been copied from the petals on a daffodil. At her waist there was a small bunch of silk violets with a yellow rose in the center.

It was a different Flora who, in this daffodil frock, looked back at her from the mirror in Anne's guest rooms. This was a Flora who had somehow come alive. Her eyes were bright; her cheeks were flushed; she—why, *actually*, she was pretty!

That night when the moon was sailing high and bright over Patchogue, the new Flora stole out of the house and made her way down to the beach.

Colin was waiting for her. He was standing where she had left him that morning. At sight of her he came eagerly forward.

"Gosh!" he said boyishly. "I've been so afraid you wouldn't come!" He added with a touch of awe in his voice: "And you're so much more beautiful than I remember you!".

For almost a minute they stood there, just staring at each other in the moonlight. There was magic in that clear white light; there was magic in the salt breeze from the sea, in the rhythmic pound of the surf, and in each other's eyes.

It was Flora who spoke first.

"I can—stay only a minute," she said a little breathlessly.

"Oh, please!" Colin begged. "I want to tell you so many things. I want to say, for instance, that after all I'm not a bit sorry you aren't a mermaid. For there's a story, you know, about a man who loved a mermaid and was loved in return by her. But when the poor mermaid had become mortal, and had exchanged her fish's tail for human feet, she found that when she walked she suffered as much pain as though she were treading on sword blades. Don't you remember that story?"

"Yes," said Flora, "I remember. Poor little mermaid!"

"I couldn't bear you to suffer pain," Colin suddenly realized. "And yet—I couldn't keep from loving you, either."

"Don't!" Flora half whispered. "Please don't say things you don't mean. It—isn't necessary."

"But, my dear, I did mean it. I didn't suppose that miracles ever happened any more, but now I know they

do. Nevertheless, I shan't say another word until I come back — for I *am* coming back, Flora MacDonald. I shan't be gone more than a few days, although I did intend to leave Patchogue for good to-morrow."

"Shan't I—keep your kodak picture, then, and give it to you when you return?"

"Yes—no, please, send it to me; then I shall hear from you. And promise, won't you, to be here when I come back?"

"Oh, yes, I'll be here for ten more days," Flora thankfully remembered.

Colin gave her a calling card with his address written on it; then he jotted down Anne's address and telephone number; so that he could get in touch with Flora as soon as he returned. After that they walked together down the beach, saying very little, but tensely, joyously aware of each other.

"You've come," he breathed raptly. Flora's heart seemed to stop

Perhaps nothing else would have happened if Flora's high-heeled slipper had not caught in a piece of wood that had washed in from the ocean and was lying half hidden in the sand—but her heel *did* catch in that bit of wreckage. As she halted and swayed a little, Colin's arm went about her—at first, to steady her; later to hold her close, while the moon seemed to pour forth a new light that bathed them in its glory and the pound of the surf became one with the thud of their hearts.

As Colin bent his head to her lips, Flora felt that she knew why she had been born into the world. Then his lips were crushed against hers and his arms tightened convulsively about her.

So they stood for one of those moments that are far too brief, but that can blot out, as though they had never been, the memory of heartaches and of long, drab years.

Then Flora drew away from Colin, gently but determinedly, and with her brown eyes as bright as any star above them.

"I must go," she remembered. "Good-by."

"But I'm coming with you," Colin protested, keeping one of her hands close in his.

"No—please! I want to go alone. I live only a block away." Colin hesitated; then, as her brown eyes pleaded with him: "Very well, dear, but you won't forget me, will you? You'll be waiting for me, won't you, Flora MacDonald?"

"Yes," she promised. "And now—please let me go."

Colin lifted her hand gently, reverently, to his lips, and then released her.

IT seemed to Flora, as she made her way back to the cottage, that she was walking on moonlight and starshine. How could her whole world change, so completely, so gloriously, in one brief day? But it *had*. Whereas before nothing had been right, now everything was perfect — and all because Colin Berkeley loved her. Oh, he did love her, he *did!* And she loved him, too—more than any girl had ever loved a man...

How strange it was to think that they had not even known each other yesterday. But what of that? They knew each other now.

And Colin was coming back in a few days. Then—*then* he would ask her to be his wife! She, Flora MacDonald, would be Mrs. Colin Berkeley!

On the following day Flora could hardly wait for the appointed hour when her kodak pictures were to be finished. But they proved worth waiting for. The snapshots of Colin were excellent. And, as Flora had hoped, he appeared to be looking down at the sand. No one would have suspected that he was asleep.

At least eight times on her way back to the cottage she took out the pictures of Colin and looked at them again, planning just how she would show them to Ruth and to the others.

When finally she reached the cottage she found Anne and her visitors on the veranda, waiting for dinner to be served. Straightway Flora displayed her prizes.

"Want to see some good kodak pictures?" she asked carelessly—oh, *very* carelessly.

"Am I in them?" Ruth inquired, smiling lazily. "Of course I do like to see my own pictures, and that's the way every one else feels, only most people won't admit it."

"Yes, you're in some of these," Flora told her, passing the pictures to Anne.

And so, of course, it was Anne who discovered the pictures of Colin.

"Who is this?" she asked at once.

Ruth and Molly, who had come to look over her shoulder, bent closer to examine the stranger.

"That?" Flora asked innocently. "Oh, that's Colin Berkeley. It's a good picture—looks exactly like him."

"Colin Berkeley!" Anne exclaimed in blank astonishment. "When on earth did you meet him, Flora?"

"Oh—I know him quite well. Why? Do you know him, too?"

"No, I don't, but of course I know all about him, and I knew he was here in Patchogue."

"What is there to know about him?" Ruth asked, still scrutinizing Colin's picture.

"Well," Anne informed her, "he is old Colin Berkeley's nephew, and you know that Colin Berkeley is one of the richest men in the country. He made simply scads and scads of money in oil."

"My word, Flora!" Molly was obviously impressed. "I hope he falls for you hard."

"But I thought," Ruth drawled, "that you said the man whose pictures Flora took on the beach *had* fallen for her hard. Isn't this the same man—or is there still another?"

Molly, who had looked a trifle dashed by Ruth's reminder, now hastened to Flora's rescue.

"Oh, yes, that's the same man. But, you see, I didn't know then that he was so frightfully rich, or rather that his uncle was. How did you know?"

"Oh, I learned about Colin Berkeley, Jr., from Helen Waverly. She told me that he was stopping at her hotel here in Patchogue; but she said she didn't think he would stay long because the girls were making such idiots of themselves over him. *Is* he going to stay, Flora?"

"Well, he isn't here now, but he's coming back," Flora reported.

"Is he coming back before you leave?" Molly asked eagerly.

"Oh, yes," said Flora, "he'll be here in a few days."

"I wonder!" Ruth meditated. "Men like that forget their promises. Don't bank too much on him, Flora."

But Ruth might just as well have suggested that Flora should cease to breathe—also, she might just as well have saved her irony. It would have taken more than a warning, or an unpleasant Ruth, to have dimmed the radiance in Flora's brown eyes.

TWO days passed. Flora sent one of the kodak pictures to the address—Lenox, Massachusetts—which Colin had given her. Then there was nothing for her to do but to wait until he returned. It was easy to wait, though, knowing that he would come back to her.

She had not expected to hear from Colin while he was away for two reasons. First, because she felt sure that he would return as soon as he could, and second because she was not accustomed to the attentions of men.

Therefore, when a great box of long-stemmed roses, with Colin's card inclosed, arrived for her late the second day, she was happier than ever. Never before had any one telegraphed her flowers. That, in itself, was an event. But to have Colin's flowers, sent because he loved her, filled to the brim her cup of joy.

And then, quite suddenly, that cup was dashed from her hands, and lay at her feet, broken beyond even the hope of mending.

It happened on the evening of the third day. She was in the living room with Anne, Anne's husband, Ruth and Molly.

Ruth was reading a New York paper. Suddenly she glanced up.

"Well," she exclaimed—and Flora noticed even then that her voice held a note of deep satisfaction—"here is some news! This should interest you, Flora. Listen:

An announcement has been made of the engagement of Miss Patricia Lane

Wilton, only daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Crane Wilton, of Park Avenue, New York City, and Mr. Colin Havens Berkeley, of Lenox, Massachusetts. Mr. Berkeley is the nephew of—

"Flora!" Molly cried sharply, slipping her arm about the colorless girl beside her. "My dear, are you ill? Oh, honey, don't look like that!" She turned furiously upon Ruth. "I wish, Ruth Tomlinson, that you'd walk out of this room, and jump in the ocean—in the *deepest* part of it!"

"Please!" Flora begged. "I—it's just that the room is warm. I think I'll—go out where it's cooler."

"What is it?" Anne's husband asked, deeply distressed.

Anne, herself, came to stand on the other side of Flora.

"Suppose we all take a walk," she gently suggested.

"No—I—I'd like to walk by myself," Flora told her. "Please let me go. I'll be quite all right."

And so Molly and Anne let her go. It seemed the only thing they could do.

Out of the cottage she went, and down the street toward the beach, not pausing until she came to the spot where she had said good-by to Colin. There, as though her strength had deserted her, she sank down upon the sand.

The moon was sailing high again over Patchogue, trailing a silver path across the sea. It glittered and wavered, that silver path leading to the moon.

"Oh, if only I could take it!" Flora thought wildly. "If only I could go far enough away to be completely forgotten!"

But she did not even hope to go to a land where she, herself, could forget. There was, she knew, no land that could give to her forgetfulness.

Always she would remember. And Colin? Colin, who had never loved her at all, who had only amused himself with her! Would he ever give her even a passing thought?

No, it was not likely. He was going to marry another girl. He would have no reason to think of the girl he had kissed on the beach at Patchogue. Perhaps he believed, Flora mused bitterly, that he had paid for that kiss with his box of flowers!

Tears were streaming unheeded down her cheeks. She made no attempt to wipe them away, for what did they matter? What did anything matter? Colin was not coming back to her. She would never, never see him again.

SUDDENLY Flora straightened, dashed the tears from her eyes, and stared mutinously out across the ocean. She had just remembered something, and she wanted to forget it. But she could not. It seemed that small, jeering demons were whispering in her ear, singing a song which tortured her. It was "Flora MacDonald's Lament."

Oh, why, she wondered desperately, had she ever railed at fate because she had been named Flora MacDonald and had had no lover to lament? What if she had, before, been inappropriately named? Wasn't that better, a million times better, than being—just another Flora MacDonald?

Why must she—now of all times—remember that song?

But the tune was haunting and the jeering little demons were persistent. On and on they sang:

"Far over yon hills o' the heather sae green,
And down by the corrie that sings by the sea,

The bonnie young Flora sat sighing her lane,
The dew on her plaid an' the tear in her e'e;
She look'd at a boat wi' the breezes that swung
Away on the waves like a bird on the main;
An' ay as it lessen'd she sighed as she sung,
'Farewell to the lad I shall ne'er see again!
Farewell to my hero, the gallant and young,
Farewell to the lad I shall ne'er see again!'"

"Farewell to the lad I shall ne'er see again!" Flora repeated through stiff lips. She added: "Good-by, Colin." Then, burying her face in her hands, she began to cry as she had not cried since she was a child.

"Oh, why did they name me after you, Flora?" she sobbed. "I don't want to be you—I don't *want* to be!"

"Darling!" a startled voice exclaimed beside her. "Flora, what on earth has happened?"

Slowly, fearfully, Flora lowered her hands from her face and turned her head.

Colin Berkeley was kneeling beside her. Now he was trying to take her in his arms.

She sprang to her feet.

"Don't touch me! Oh—don't dare touch me!"

Colin's astonishment appeared to be quite unfeigned.

"Why — dearest," he faltered, "what is it? What have I done?"

"What have you *done!*" Flora blazed at him. "Didn't you tell me, a few nights ago, that you loved me; didn't you kiss me and ask me to wait for you when all the time you knew you were going to marry another girl? Oh, I know, now, that it was only play to you, and that perhaps I was ridiculous to take you so seriously! But, just the same, I don't see why men have any right to do things like that. I think it's—horrible. So I—I'm sorry you came back. I—don't want to see you and—and I shan't talk with you any more. Good-by. I'm—"

"Flora!" Colin cried, grasping her by the arms, and turning her so that he could see her face in the moonlight. "What do you mean? I am not going to marry any other girl!"

"Oh, you *are!*" Flora struggled to be free. "We saw the announcement in a newspaper. You—"

"Wait a minute!" Colin urged. "So that's it! Why, darling, that wasn't the announcement of my engagement, but of my cousin's."

"Your—*cousin's!*" Flora repeated, her eyes wide, startled. "But — the paper announced the engagement of Colin Havens Berkeley, of Lenox, Massachusetts—"

"I presume it did. That is my cousin's name, also. And he, too, lives in Lenox. We were both named for Uncle Colin—in the hope, of course, that he would leave his money to us. I am sorry to say our parents were mercenary, but—the fact remains." He added dryly: "If Uncle Colin had had a dozen sisters, instead of two, and they had all given birth to sons, I imagine that this part of the country would have been plentifully sprinkled with Colin Havens Berkeleys."

"Oh," said Flora in a small, tremulous voice, "I—but I didn't know!"

Colin looked down at her quizzically, tenderly then he released her arms, just long enough to put his own about her.

"Of course you didn't know," he agreed. "And as I did not expect the announcement of my cousin's engagement to be put in the paper so soon, I

could not have expected you to see it and confuse him with me. But now, since all this has happened, I want you to be absolutely truthful with me: were you crying, sweetheart, because you thought I was going to marry another girl? Because, if you were, won't it be all right if I don't wait, but tell you right now that I love you, that I haven't been able to think of another thing since the moment I met you, and that if you won't marry me, I'll never marry any one?"

"Yes," Flora confessed into his shoulder, "it will be all right to tell me those things now—for I *was* crying because I thought you were going to marry another girl."

"Oh, my darling!" Colin said huskily. "Then you love me, you'll—marry me?"

"Yes," said Flora, with her head still burrowed in his shoulder, "I do and—I will."

Then Colin would not allow even his shoulder to hide her lips from him any longer. He tilted back her head, and kissed her until all the pain and tears were gone from her eyes, leaving in their place a soft radiance that was to remain.

"WHY — Flora!" a feminine voice exclaimed from behind them.

Flora slipped out of Colin's arms, turned, and faced Anne, Molly, and Ruth.

"We were worried about you," Anne continued uncertainly. "We—supposed you were down here alone."

"No, Mr. Berkeley was with me," Flora told them, and she presented Colin to the three women, whose curiosity was expressed in their faces.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Berkeley!" Ruth remembered. "How do you do? We were reading about you to-night in the paper."

"No, you weren't," Flora serenely assured her; "you were reading about his cousin. Nevertheless"—her brown eyes, demure eyes now, swept the group—"this Colin Berkeley is announcing his engagement, also—to me."

"Why, bless your heart!" Molly exclaimed delightedly, and hugged her friend with all the fervor of an overgrown puppy.

Anne, too, was greatly pleased by Flora's announcement. Both she and Molly heartily congratulated Colin.

Ruth's comments were characteristic.

"Well," she remarked, "it's a good thing for Flora, Mr. Berkeley, that you are yourself and not your cousin. And how excited you must be, Flora—actually engaged!"

"Oh," she was blithely assured, "it's much more than just exciting. It's wonderful and—but then you'll know all about it yourself one day. At least, I *hope* you will."

Molly giggled and linked her arm through Anne's.

"Come on—and you, too, Ruth. Let's wander on up the beach. I know these people will hate us to leave them, but possibly, after a few minutes, they won't miss us *too* much."

As the three girls strolled away, Flora heard Molly say impishly, "I always knew, Ruth, didn't you, that Flora would marry before we did?"

Then Colin's arms were around her again; so Ruth and Anne and even Molly were forgotten.

"It's queer," she mused dreamily, "that one can be so unhappy one minute and so terribly happy the next—for, oh, I was miserable, Colin! I thought I was going to be just another

Flora MacDonald, and that I would go on lamenting you all my life. It was awful."

"Blessed heart!" Colin whispered, crushing his lips to hers. "Imagine you—so beautiful, so desirable, so adorable—crying over *me!* The only way I can figure it out is that I'm just everlastingly lucky. If I were not, I couldn't have made any impression at all on a girl like you. But you'll never cry again, if I can help it. There'll be no more tears and no more Flora MacDonald. There will be, instead, Flora Berkeley."

"And she will not have one thing in the world to lament!" Flora exulted, tightening her arms about Colin's neck.

"I hope not, darling," Colin told her between kisses. "Certainly, if I can make you happy, I'm going to do it."

"If *you* can make me happy!" Flora scoffed tenderly. "Why, darling, nothing and no one else in the world ever could. But if you are with me always I couldn't be unhappy."

"Then," said Colin, close to her lips, "there's nothing to worry about, for whatever comes I shall be with you—always."

Dream On

I USED to dream in the long ago,
That the girl I loved would be fair as snow,
Milk-white skin and hair spun gold,
A Juno from out of the northland cold.
Tall, and of stately grace and fame,
Must be the lady who shared my name . . .

But one day under a genial sky,
A wisp of a dryad caught my eye,
A sprite, a gamon of no renown,
Except that her hair and eyes are brown,
Of wonderful shades, and she thinks that I
Should run for President by and by . . .

Dream on! When you meet the right girl you'll know,
For she'll fit the curve of your arm . . . just so!

—*Peter A. Lea*

Kayce did not know how she got back to the house, but the man could forget no moment of that journey

The Brave Deceiver

Another's need forced humble Kayce to play the rôle of glorified Cinderella, but her heart heard the coming strokes of twelve when all must vanish!

By Eleanor Elliott Carroll

THE low, raftered dining room of Wildcat Inn was filled to its capacity. Clouds of smoke made the atmosphere dense; the hum of many voices, the clatter of dishes in the adjoining kitchen, hurrying waitresses bearing laden trays and loud calls from impatient tourists all added to the confusion of the dinner hour.

Most of the waitresses were sturdy mountain girls, accustomed to hard work and heavy loads, ready with a pert retort to a presumptuous guest,

eager eyed for expected tips. This was their harvest time. The Inn, situated high in the North Carolina mountain region, was open only three months of the year, and every one connected with the establishment must make hay while the sun shone.

There was one girl, however, who looked out of place among her red-cheeked coworkers. Slim, dainty, with a wealth of fair hair framing a small, heart-shaped face, with two frightened blue eyes fixed straight ahead, Kayce Merriman staggered into the room with a burden far too great for her frail strength. It was her first day of service, and her terror was that she might fail to hold this job. To lose it meant another long, discouraging search for work—even hunger. She had known that, too.

Her arms trembled under their load. Her sweet young mouth took on a strained expression as she moved toward her goal, the long table nearest the door. Only a few more steps to go—

And then it happened. Colliding with a stout, hastening waitress, Kayce's tray went crashing to the floor! Dishes, glassware, steaming food, hot coffee, mingled at her feet. A woman's angry voice added to the hubbub:

"Did you ever in your life see such carelessness? Look at my coat, it's utterly ruined. Somebody's got to pay for it!"

Abe Hammersley, the fat proprietor of the Inn, came on a run. Fury shone from his shoe-button eyes. He caught the terrified girl by the arm and propelled her toward the swinging door.

"Get out of here this minute!" he yelled. "I knew you wasn't no good when I saw you, but thought I'd give you a chanst. Beat it! All that food wasted, and I got to pay for your ruining people's clothes, too. Go and don't dare come back!"

TWO men seated at the long table which Kayce had been about to serve, looked on silently. The elder, a shrewd-faced man of fifty-odd, suddenly leaned toward his slenderly built and much younger companion, and whispered excitedly:

"Did you see that girl's face, Morris? Who does she remind you of? Isn't she the living image of old Collister's daughter? You've seen the portrait in his study many times."

The girl's face was turned in their direction at the moment. The man called Morris leaned forward, studying her intently.

"By George, you're right, Randall!" he exclaimed. "She's a dead ringer for the picture, even to that queer little quirk of the eyebrows. Look here, we can't lose sight of her. Let's go outside and wait. That old bird is giving her the grand bounce now."

The two men were standing beside a powerful motor car when Kayce, her pale cheeks streaked with tears, came around the corner of the squat log building. Ralph Morris, hat in hand, stepped forward with an ingratiating smile.

"Excuse me," he began politely. "My friend, Mr. Randall, and I both feel we are to blame, in a way, for your accident a little while ago. Two hungry travelers, we demanded too much, and that's why you stumbled with the tray. We'd like to help—"

"Oh, no, sir!" Kayce flushed with embarrassment. "It was all my fault—I couldn't see for the smoke. Really, it was careless. Mr. Hammersley had a right to be angry. This was

my first day here, and I—I wasn't used to the work—"

"Any one could observe that," said the older man, in a kindly, sympathetic tone. "You're very different from these other young women. But you must let us do something, my child. Do you live near here?"

"Not so far," was the shy reply. "About two miles."

"Then we'll drive you home." Mark Randall opened the rear door of the car. "You drive, Morris. I'd like to talk to the young lady. Which direction, Miss—er—"

"My name is Kayce Merriman," she supplied promptly. "But I can walk it easily, sir. Your dinner—you're losing it. I couldn't let you—"

"Nonsense, Miss Merriman, get in. We can dine when we reach Asheville. I've an idea we can do a great deal for you, and I'd like to hear something about you—your home, your family. Drive slowly, Morris."

Kayce settled back against the soft seat, hope springing to life within her. The elderly man looked so fatherly, so concerned about her. She soon found herself giving him a straightforward account of her eighteen uneventful years. The only child of John and Selina Merriman, she had never traveled a hundred miles from that section of the country. Both parents were now dead. She was alone in the world.

"My father was a farmer," she told the interested man, whose countenance had changed slightly when she spoke of her family. "But he lost all his property while he was in bad health. Mother and I rented a little place outside Asheville, where she tried to do sewing for the summer boarders at the big hotels. She—she died, too, three months ago."

"And you have no one at all who has any claim upon you?" persisted Mark Randall. His gray eyes glinted shrewdly when she told him there was not a soul who had any interest whatever in her—not even a close friend.

"Mother was proud, you see." The sweet mouth quivered. "She didn't want anybody who once knew us to know how we had to live these past two years. Here's my home now." She pointed to a tiny, ramshackle cottage that sat a little way off the road. At a signal from the man beside her, Ralph Morris drew up before the sloping yard and stopped.

KAYCE thanked both of them for bringing her home, then went inside, her new hopes fading. Although the kind, fatherly Mr. Randall called after her that they would see her again before leaving the mountains, she felt she would never hear anything from them. It was only a kindly impulse to bring her home. Wealthy men like the two who had just driven away were not likely to remember a shabby, poverty-stricken girl whom they had befriended to the extent of a short ride.

The front room of the small house was bare and cheerless. Only a few rickety chairs, a sewing machine, a couch in one corner that answered for a bed. The adjoining room was kitchen and dining room as well.

Kayce raised her wan face to a little framed photograph on the wall. It was of a plain-featured, sensible looking woman, whose careworn countenance showed the strain of hard work, even though it had been taken when the Merriman fortunes were at high tide. Something in the expression of that dear face sent a pang of self-reproach through the girl.

"I wouldn't have you back, dar-

ling," she quavered. "You were so tired and unhappy—after daddy left us. It's better as it is, mumsie. I'll try again. There must be something for me—somewhere—"

At that moment there was a sharp rap at the door.

She wiped her eyes quickly and went to open it. Her two new acquaintances stood on the threshold.

"May we come in a few minutes, Miss Merriman?" asked Mark Randall smilingly. "We have a proposition to make which you may find it possible to accept. It's a position that I'm sure you'll be interested in, once you've heard the particulars."

Wonderingly, Kayce drew up chairs for the two men, then dropped on the couch before them. Her hands were clasped together as she leaned forward, and a slight flush stained her cheeks. She was utterly unaware of the lovely picture she made sitting there, her blue eyes wide with surprise.

"It is a simple story, Miss Merriman," continued Randall. "We are lawyers, Mr. Morris and I, and represent the affairs of Ex-Senator Collister, multimillionaire, whose splendid estate is situated outside of Washington. I am going to tell you the situation in as few words as possible, my dear, so listen attentively.

"Nineteen years ago," the lawyer went on, "Kathleen Collister, a beautiful girl about your age, and so like you that the resemblance is miraculous, eloped with a young musician who was teaching in Washington. She was his pupil. Senator Washburn Collister, then a widower, refused to forgive his daughter. He never saw her again, although he learned that she died at the birth of an infant—a girl.

"He lost trace of his son-in-law, although later on his heart melted. He would have given all he possessed to get that child. He is slowly dying now, and—not exactly in his right mind. We have been looking for this child, who would now be about eighteen. His last days could be made peaceful and happy, my dear, if you will consent to our plan."

"Poor old gentleman," Kayce said softly. "How sad it is you can't find his granddaughter. But how could I help—"

"By impersonating the girl," was the startling reply. "It would be a deed of mercy. Perhaps only a week or so of life remains for the repentant old grandfather. We want to make this short while one of peace."

THE color drained from Kayce's cheeks under the lawyer's piercing gaze. She stared her horror at the suggestion.

"But that would be a—a terrible thing to do," she gasped. "Oh, I couldn't! You—surely you can yet find the real person—"

"Impossible," cut in Mark Randall tersely. "We've traced Paul Ainslie, the father, through this entire State, and find that he died at Lenoir, North Carolina, six months after he lost his wife. We have talked with the kind old couple at whose home he boarded during his illness, and they tell us he spoke of a baby, saying it, too, was dead. So you see we've sorrowful news to take back to our waiting client."

Ralph Morris, who had been watching Kayce closely, spoke for the first time. He had a remarkably persuasive voice.

"It will be more like going there as a nurse, Miss Merriman. That's been done many times, you know. Justifiable deception, it's called. Letting a

very miserable man die believing he has righted a wrong. Afterward, we will see to your future. Secure you a fine government position, perhaps.

"Kayce, I've got to tell you now! I love you. Could you care?"

Anyway, you will receive five thousand dollars—"

"I—wouldn't take money for it, if I—consented," Kayce interrupted quickly. She was weakening. Going to a feeble-minded invalid in the capacity of tender nurse appealed to her. It was a work she had always yearned to be trained for. Ministering to the helpless, caring for the suffering—

"But how would you explain—wouldn't there have to be papers and things of that sort?" she asked vaguely, fearfully.

"Not necessary, in the state of our client's health," interposed Mr. Randall. "He has left everything in my hands. I have plenty of data concerning Paul Ainslie—everything but references about his infant's death. The man's diary, which we have with us, doesn't speak of the child except as the one tie that kept him alive. Senator Collister will accept anything I say without question, and there is your re-

markable resemblance to his daughter to back us up. Truly, Miss Merriman, my partner and I are acting solely as friends and sympathizers. Won't you help us?"

Kayce looked around the sordid room. She shuddered at the thought of what lay ahead of her should she refuse this offer. It wouldn't be sinful—she'd do her best to give comfort to an aged, heartbroken and repentant man, on the verge of the grave.

"Y-e-s, I'll go," she said suddenly, both small hands gripped together fiercely. "That is—if there are no relatives—other people whom I might be deceiving—"

"Not one," was the quick reply. "Old Collister's millions will go to charity at his death. There's a godson, I believe, but he's enormously rich in his own right. Besides, he's at the other end of the earth at present."

She didn't see the glint in Ralph Morris's eyes, nor the bland, satisfied smile on Mark Randall's face.

THINGS happened so rapidly that it seemed like a dream. There wasn't much to do. Just a hurried packing of a shabby bag with her few worn clothes, a bundle of her mother's letters and papers, and stopping long enough to dash off a note to their landlord, asking him to pack and store the skimpy household furnishings until called for. This she mailed when they passed through Asheville.

Mr. Randall drove now, and Ralph Morris sat beside her, exerting himself to be affable and interesting. She watched him surreptitiously, thinking he might be handsome but for his close-set gray eyes, which gave him a crafty look. His light hair was too thin, also, and plastered sleekly to his small head.

But he was decidedly friendly, and had already spoken of helping her get a position later on. He kept reminding her of the deed of mercy she was about to perform, until Kayce began to regard the deception in the light of a noble, unselfish deed. Doctors often deluded deranged patients, he told her. Finding her had been a Heaven-sent accident.

They stopped overnight in Danville, but resumed their journey by daybreak the next morning, arriving in Washington at dusk. There a low-toned conversation took place between the two lawyers. Kayce could not hear what was said, but shortly afterward Ralph Morris left them. He held Kayce's hand closely for a long moment before saying good-by.

"I'll call on you to-morrow," he told her. "And I hope all the morrows to come. I want to be your friend, understand."

The girl shivered involuntarily. His mesmeric eyes chilled her when they met and held her gaze. She breathed easier when he had gone.

"Splendid chap," remarked Mr. Randall. Then casually: "Suppose you sit in front with me, young lady. I want to prompt you as to how you must act when we reach the Collister home."

The man's serious warnings about the story she must tell filled Kayce with new forebodings. What had heretofore seemed perfectly natural, and only a kind deed on her part, now assumed the aspect of a gigantic fraud. She should keep her own name, saying that the Merrimans had adopted her when an infant. She must exert herself to win her supposed grandfather's affection.

"Not that it will be hard," was the complimentary remark. "You are too

like his own daughter, Miss Kayce. I've already telegraphed the good news to the Senator, who is anxiously expecting us."

"I've been trying to look at what I'm doing in the light of a—service," Kayce murmured. "You—you make it sound different, somehow."

Oh, if she were only back in her bare, comfortless home! But it was too late now. They were entering the driveway of a suburban estate, and beyond, through the tall trees that clustered around the house itself, she glimpsed the stately walls of a rambling stone mansion. Her heart rose in her mouth as they drove up to the door, where a manservant hastened forward.

Behind, waiting on the threshold of the great grilled door, stood another man, a tall, well-built person of perhaps twenty-six or twenty-seven. He was dressed in knickerbockers, and was bareheaded. The brisk wind blew a mass of brown hair across his wide forehead. His clear, hazel eyes lit up at the sight of the girl, and he came to meet them. Kayce heard Mark Randall mutter something under his breath. Evidently the lawyer was not too well pleased at the sight of this younger man.

But Randall greeted the stranger affably.

"Hello, Derry," said the lawyer. "I didn't know you were anywhere in this part of the world. Guess you've heard the glad tidings, however. Miss Ainslie, let me present Mr. Derrick Trent, your grandfather's godson."

A warm hand inclosed Kayce's cold one. A flashing smile revealed firm white teeth. The frightened girl had a fleeting impression of one of the strongest, yet at the same time most boyish countenances she had ever known. The type of person whom children and animals trusted instinctively. This was Derry Trent.

TONGUE-TIED with embarrassment, nervous to the point of collapse, Kayce could not utter a word. It seemed as if those frank young eyes were reading her very soul and pronouncing her an impostor.

"Miss Ainslie hasn't yet become accustomed to her name," continued Mark Randall. "She's always been called Miss Kayce Merriman, you see. Let's go inside. How's the old gentleman bearing up, Derry?"

"Just fine, Mr. Randall. Ever since your night letter arrived, he's insisted upon sitting up, so as to receive you and—is the name Kayce?" He turned around and faced the girl in the dim old hall, with its soft rugs, heavy furniture, and beautiful statuary.

She had to answer. "Y-e-s," she murmured, her voice shaking. "It—I think my mother said my name was a—family one of her side—"

Mr. Randall's fat hand closed warningly on her arm.

"We will go right up to the Senator, my dear," he suggested, leading her to the stairs. "See you later on, Derry," he flung back over his shoulder.

When they were out of earshot the lawyer leaned close to her and hissed: "That came near being a bad break, young woman. Take care it doesn't happen again."

She wanted to turn and fly from the house; from this man whom she was beginning to distrust; from the clean-cut, clear-eyed Derry Trent, who had welcomed her so warmly. But it was too late. A white-clad nurse opened a door just then and beckoned to them.

"This is the young lady?" she asked

smilingly. "You may go in at once. My patient wants to receive you alone. He asks that you wait outside, please, Mr. Randall."

There was nothing to do but obey. Kayce found herself within a huge, luxuriant bedroom. In a big, overstuffed chair before a fire, sat a shriveled old man. Sparse white locks fell down on his yellowed cheeks, but his keen blue eyes sparkled with the fires of youth.

He stared at her for a tense moment, then held out a shaking hand.

"Come here, child," he said with emotion. "Let me look at Kathleen's baby. I can't see you at such a distance. Come."

She moved toward him, her knees giving way with each step. She wanted to cry out: "I'm not your daughter's child! I'm only an impostor in your home. Please forgive me and let me go!"

But she only bit down hard on her lower lip and stood there silently, tears in her blue eyes, while the aged invalid searched her face.

"There wouldn't have been any doubt about your parentage, little girl," went on that weak voice, after a long, agonizing wait. "You are Kathleen herself, feature for feature, come back to me after all these years, God be praised. I've taken on new life since I received Randall's message. He shall be well recompensed for his success in finding you. Is your name also Kathleen, dear?"

"It—it's Kayce," was the stammered reply.

Oh, how dared Mark Randall and Ralph Morris deceive her so cruelly! This affectionate old man was not dying, and he certainly wasn't deranged. How could she continue the deception, and worse still, how could she ever undeceive him, when he was so happy over her coming?

"Kayce?" repeated the invalid. "Where did you get such a strange name, child? Who gave it to you, and why?"

"It — my mother — Mrs. Merriman—" Kayce couldn't go on. Her voice broke, and tears streamed down her cheeks. Here she was, denying her dead mother, the best parent a girl ever had.

"There, there," the old man soothed, patting her hands gently. "We won't go into your past, child. You are overcome, and no wonder." He pressed a button near the fireplace. The summons was answered at once by a stout, gray-haired woman.

"This is Mrs. Barclay, my housekeeper, Kathleen — I'm going to call you by your mother's name, child—I want you to go with her. She'll look after your comfort, won't you, Barclay?"

"Indeed, sir, an' I will," answered the woman. There were tears in her kind eyes. "Come, Miss Kathleen. Your rooms adjoin the Senator's."

"Kiss me, child, before you leave," begged the aged man. "There, now," as she pressed her white lips against his cheek, "I'll talk to Randall a while, then you must come back to me. I don't want you out of my sight long."

KAYCE followed Mrs. Barclay through a study, into a narrow corridor, and was ushered across the threshold of the most exquisite boudoir she had ever imagined. Blue and gold everywhere. Silken hangings, velvet rugs, beautiful pictures, and beyond a white bedroom, the bed on a raised dais. Her senses reeled as the housekeeper led the way, pointing out a sea-blue bath still farther on. She

caught her breath on a sob when the woman explained how her grandfather had been refurnishing this suite for a whole year, always having faith in his search for his grandchild.

"He even filled your wardrobe, my dear," Mrs. Barclay went on, opening a sliding, mirrored door in the wall. "Everything a young lady could ever need or want." And her observant eyes glanced toward Kayce's shabby suitcase, which some one had already placed in the bedroom.

But the bewildered girl's eyes were drinking in the lovely, diaphanous garments that hung, row after row, in that scented closet. There were dozens of frocks of all kinds: street, afternoon dresses, evening gowns. And beneath, on a white shelf, rested all sorts of shoes: from sturdy walking oxfords to the daintiest satin slippers.

"Your lingerie is in the dresser drawers, Miss Ainslie," Mrs. Barclay told her. "And now I will leave you to dress for dinner, which will be ready in an hour. Anything more I can do, my dear—excuse me, but you seem no more than a little girl—"

"Oh, just love me!" cried Kayce, flinging her arms around the woman's neck. "I—haven't anybody in the world to—to care—" She burst into wild weeping, her head on the startled housekeeper's shoulder.

"You poor little girl." The motherly arms went around the slight form. "Poor motherless lamb. I loved you, my dear, soon as I laid eyes on you, an' you so like Miss Kathleen. I nursed her, you see. That's her picture over your mantel. Many's the night I've cried salt tears about her, too."

The first thing Kayce did after Mrs. Barclay left her alone was to go over and stand in front of a painting of a very young girl clad in a white frock. It was remarkably like herself, even to the little point in the eyebrows. Those steady blue eyes stared down at her curiously—it seemed reproachfully.

Oh, why had she ever been mad enough to take part in such a conspiracy? She thought she understood the motives of Mark Randall and Ralph Morris. They evidently expected to reap a big reward for having located the Collister heiress. But she—there was no excuse for her. Better far to have starved to death than to deceive these wonderful people.

Most of all, however, she thought of Derry Trent. How he would despise her when he knew the truth! And, sooner or later, she'd have to tell the whole, unvarnished story to the dear old man who called her his granddaughter; who had lavished all these evidences of love on her already...

AN hour later she was fully dressed, and she would not have been human had she not exulted at the dazzling vision that gazed back from the long pier glass in her boudoir.

She made a beautiful picture, dressed in a shimmering green evening frock that was shot here and there with silver. The soft folds of chiffon swirled about her graceful figure like a summer breeze, the delicate shade bringing out unsuspected reddish lights in her soft blond curls, which clung closely to her well-shaped head like spun gold. Her cheeks were highly flushed, her lips two red flowers. Kayce could not take her eyes from her satin-shod feet, with their glistening buckles. Never in her life had she even seen such slippers, or such a breath-taking frock.

"It—can't be—me," she gasped, staring at herself. "It just can't!"

The gong sounded below at that mo-

ment, and immediately Mrs. Barclay opened the door. She, too, stared open-mouthed. "If I didn't know better," she said in an awed whisper, "I'd declare you were Miss Kathleen come back. Come, honey, Mr. Derry's waiting for you in the lower hall."

"I brought you here because—I intended you for my wife!"

He was standing beside the newel post, immaculate in dinner clothes, and looking like a young Greek god. He gazed at the lovely girl, his eyes tender, his lips smiling. Then he drew her hand through his arm and led her into the vast dining room, where a silver and crystal-laden table awaited them. It was set only for two.

Looking back on that first evening, Kayce always wondered how she managed to appear so gay, so much at ease with this entertaining young man who had traveled over the whole earth, and could tell her so many things of countries she'd read about. Mentally, she rejoiced that her youthful days had been spent in much study; in reading good books. They were soon friends, and when they went into the old Senator's study together, later on, Derry's

bright, boyish presence made the ordeal far easier than it would otherwise have been.

That night, however, alone in her sumptuous suite, Kayce again felt the pangs of conscience. It was terrible to be deceiving these warm-hearted, lovable people. Her very soul had quaked when the aged man who was supposed to be her grandfather had held her hands closely and asked how she liked Derry.

"I think he's splendid," was her girlish reply.

"I'm glad you do, child," said the Senator. "Derry is the son of my oldest and best friend. Had I not found you, he would have been my heir, although his own fortune exceeds mine. Good night, Kathleen. God bless you."

It hurt, recalling this conversation. It was like twisting a knife in a deep wound. Derry, with his twinkling eyes, his boyish manner, his clean, honest outlook upon life, believing in her, already treating her like a dearly loved sister—no, not a sister. There was an expression in his eyes when he left her which no brother had ever bestowed upon such a near relative...

"I can't keep it up," Kayce sobbed aloud. "And I could never tell them—now. I'll stay on for a few days, then I — must go away from — from this beautiful home. Oh, how I wish I were really and truly your daughter," she told the portrait over her mantel.

And Kathleen Collister seemed to stare back at the huddled girl on the bed, her blue eyes disdainful, filled with utter scorn for such a wicked little impostor.

THE next few days brimmed over with excitement for Kayce. She moved through them like one in a trance. Her position in the Collister home seemed to be assured by every one, even the admiring, solicitous servants. Gifts poured in upon her, ordered by her supposed and adoring grandfather. Nothing was too good for Kathleen's daughter.

"You've given me a new lease on life," he told her. "I only despise myself for the long years of hatred which I've cherished for your father. We always pay dearly for our sins, little granddaughter, and I'm paying for mine as I sit here thinking of those lost years, when I could have had you with me."

Pay for one's sins! The words struck the girl like a sharp blow in the face. How dearly she would always pay for hers! Already she loved this frail old man with every breath she drew. And yet she must leave him. Must let him know she had no claims upon his affection. She was counting the days, the hours that were left to her.

"I'll stay the week out, and do all for him that I can, then I'll steal away in the night. I—can write and tell him—everything. I couldn't have him looking at me while—I told the dreadful truth." It was thus that Kayce communed with her guilty conscience.

But when with Derry there were long moments in which she forgot her deception. Their merry laughter rang through the wide halls of the great house. They drove together; played tennis on the smooth courts beneath her grandfather's windows, Derry teaching her how to wield a racquet; they visited the museums in Washington together, Derry acting as her guide. And old Washburn Collister looked on, a satisfied smile coming frequently to his withered lips. Things were exactly as he would have had them.

There was one thing that Kayce dreaded most of all, the inevitable meeting with either of the two men who had brought her to Washington. Why had they deceived her about their aged client's condition? Certainly there were no evidences of mental disorder in that clear thinking old brain. Nor did the sick man appear to be in any immediate danger of dying. While seventy was a great age, many people lived much longer, and now that she knew and loved him so tenderly, the girl prayed every night that his years would be prolonged indefinitely.

Mark Randall had called at the house several times, and always gave her a nod of approval when witnessing her devoted care of the invalid. Once he stopped her in the hall and whispered:

"You're doing fine, keep it up. Already you've given him a new lease on life."

Oh, how she hoped she had! In a way it would excuse her cruel deception of the finest character she had ever known. She redoubled her efforts to amuse and entertain her patient, as she liked to call him in her mind. But her heart was heavy at the thought of having to confess, even in writing, how she had deceived him.

And then something happened which added unbearable anguish to her already heavy-laden young heart, leaving her groping blindly in a maze of pain.

There were several thoroughbred horses in the Collister stables, and Derry was anxious to teach Kayce to ride. Her grandfather warmly seconded the proposal.

"In my youth," he said, "every young lady rode horseback. You wouldn't be your mother's child, my dear, if you didn't ride well. You must learn at once, then you and Derry can exercise my favorites every day."

And so one bright June day, clad in the trim, tailored togs which had arrived that morning, Kayce, her fluffy hair blowing back in the stiff breeze, cantered down the driveway beside Derry.

Riding seemed to come natural with the girl. She sat her horse like a veteran rider, Derry told her.

"But don't give him his head yet," Derry cautioned, as they swept across the avenue and into a bridle path. "He's been penned up too long to slack the reins until he's a bit tired."

He hadn't spoken in time, however. The big roan, scenting the woodland air, gave a sudden jerk of his head and bolted. There was a flashing vision of a slim, huddled form, a white, frightened face, as Kayce was borne out of sight, both arms clinging around the horse's neck. Derry was after her in mad pursuit, his own eyes filled with horror when he saw a low stone wall just ahead.

"Hold fast!" he shouted. "He's going to jump—don't let go!"

But he was too late. The big horse struck his hoofs against the wall, staggered over it clumsily, then went flying onward. But the saddle was empty!

He checked his own mount, leaped down and went running to the wall. There, on the ground, her arms flung out, her eyes closed, one foot doubled beneath her, lay Kayce.

AT first he thought she had been instantly killed. There was a slight cut on her temple. He dropped on his knees beside that inert body, gathering it in his arms.

"Kay—darling!" he cried hoarsely. "Look at me—speak to me! Oh, God! Don't let her die—"

Two blue eyes opened slowly, stared up into his ashen young face for a moment, and then a faint smile came to those sweet, curving lips.

"You aren't hurt—badly, darling?" he implored. "Tell me you're all right—no broken bones. I'll never forgive myself. It was all my fault—"

Nothing could have so quickly restored Kayce's senses. Derry, the man she loved with every drop of blood in her veins, calling her darling! She struggled in his arms like a captured bird, her eyes filled with terror. She sat erect, then got to her feet slowly, warding him off with both hands, when he would have lifted her himself.

"Don't—touch me!" she gasped pitifully, her mouth trembling, tears standing on her long lashes. "I—I'm not—hurt much. Just a little twinge in—my foot—"

"Did I frighten you, sweetheart?" he broke in, ignoring her outstretched palms and gathering her in his embrace again. "I couldn't help it, Kay. I love you! Do you hear that—I worship—adore you! It doesn't take months or years for a man to know when he has lost his heart to the one girl in the world. Kay! Is there any hope for me? Do you think you could learn to care—beloved? I've said it now, and there's no taking it back. Answer, darling!"

Could she care? Only the angels in heaven knew the agony that was rushing through poor little Kayce's self-accusing mind. She tried to speak; tried to deny the truth which he seemed to be reading in her eyes, but words would not come.

"I—I—oh, let me go!" she wailed. "Don't—ever talk of—of such a thing—again—" The words died away in a whisper. It seemed as if black waters were rising...rising. They roared around her head, then covered her completely...

Kayce came to her senses in the library, where a white-lipped, shaken young man was placing her on the couch. She saw Mrs. Barclay standing behind him, and held out her arms to the motherly old housekeeper.

"I want *you* with me—just *you!*" pleaded the girl. "Send—him—away."

And Derry, with a hurt expression on his worried countenance, left them together.

"I'm not hurt, Mrs. Barclay—honestly, I'm all right. See?" To prove her statement, frantically uttered, Kayce tried to stand. But the agony of pressure on her swelling ankle showed in her face. "I want to get to—my room, please," she begged piteously.

"And so you shall, lamb," was the soothing reply. "Just a minute till I get you a wee bit of stimulant. Now sit still; I'll be right back."

The door had scarcely closed behind the housekeeper before some one entered the room by way of one long French window. Kayce looked up in alarm, thinking it was Derry. But Ralph Morris's cynical gray eyes met her startled stare. He extended his hand to her.

"Too bad that I timed my first social call so inopportunely," he said suavely, pressing her fingers, his bold gaze wandering over her slender figure in its well-fitting riding togs. "I saw Derrick Trent bring you in, and feared you were badly injured. I am happy to see that such is not the case."

"I—had a fall from my horse," Kayce stammered. "I'm not hurt—much. Just my ankle, and this—little cut on my forehead." She tried to remove her hand from his, but he held it

fast. His steely eyes bored down into hers.

"Listen to me," he hissed, close to her ear. "I've not been here before, because we have to play this game carefully. But it's time to let you know *why* I've brought you to this house as old Collister's granddaughter. I mean to make you my wife as soon as the old duffer kicks off. Understand?"

"Your wife?" she repeated dully. Then a flare of the former Kayce Merriman came back. "You must be crazy," she said contemptuously. "And now let my hand go this instant. Leave me, or I'll call a servant and have you put out—"

He shook her by the arm, silencing her. "Shut up, you brazen little fool!" he ordered coarsely. "Think I'll stand such insolence from an unscrupulous adventuress like you? Don't play innocence with me. I've got your number. You came readily enough, didn't you?"

"I came because you and Mr. Randall said I could save a life—make a poor old man's last days happy. But you fooled me. He isn't dying and he's not deranged. I'm going to tell him the whole truth this very day!"

Ralph Morris's lips curled in a sardonic smile. "And have yourself thrown into jail?" he sneered. "Oh, we've covered things prettily, my mountain tigress. Tell your story by all means, and Randall and I will cap it with a better one. We've got it all planned. You came to us, claiming to be that infant of Kathleen Collister's. We took your word because of your remarkable likeness to the lady. Do you know what penalty one pays for fraud like yours? Twenty years in the penitentiary is the usual sentence. Now will you listen?"

Prison. Two reputable attorneys against a friendless, unknown girl, whose denial of their plausible statements would be scoffed at by any jury. Scorn from Derry—Mrs. Barclay—everybody. The cruel blow such a revelation would deal to that helpless, tender, loving old man upstairs.

Kayce saw it all unfurled before her eyes. She sank upon the couch, covering her face with both hands. Ralph Morris dropped down beside her.

"But we are going to stand by you *if* you behave yourself," he purred. "And between us—you and I are headed for vast wealth, Kayce Merriman. I meant you for my wife the moment Randall and I persuaded you to come here. Hush! Some one is coming. When can I see you alone—to talk things over?"

"To-morrow, this—time," she faltered. And at that moment Mrs. Barclay bustled into the room.

FOLLOWED two hours of torture which few are forced to endure. Kayce lay on her bed, face turned away from Mrs. Barclay, whose motherly ministrations were like a whiplash on a raw wound. How that kind old face would change when the whole truth came out. With what scorn and contempt would this entire household of attentive servants regard the girl who had come among them as rightful young mistress of the palatial Collister home. And the dear old man who considered her his beloved granddaughter—she dared not think of him.

"Oh, God!" she prayed wildly. "Don't let the terrible truth kill him! He's so gentle, so sorry for what he did against his own child—"

Mrs. Barclay's tender voice broke in on this frantic prayer: "You must try and eat a bite of this nice dinner, Miss

Kathleen, deary. It 'll help you control your poor nerves, which seem to be shook to pieces."

"I can't, Mrs. Barclay, please. Later—maybe."

"And here's a note from Mr. Derry, the dear lad. He's all upset, honey. Read it. Send him some message, or he'll be battering down the door, so certain he is that you're badly hurt."

Through swimming eyes Kayce read:

DARLING!

You are my darling, you know, and I'm never going to give up hope of winning the one girl in the whole wide world. Send me just a word, Kay. Tell me you are not ill, and that you do care—even the tiniest bit—for your anxious, heartsick DERRY.

A low moan escaped the girl's tense lips. Mrs. Barclay leaned over the bed, but a trembling hand pushed her aside.

"Leave me alone, please!" pleaded Kayce. "I want to be—alone!"

"Sure, deary, I'll go and let you sleep it off. What shall I tell Mr. Derry, lambie?"

"Nothing—nothing! There's no answer, Mrs. Barclay. No—answer—"

But scarcely had the woman disappeared before Kayce was up. She limped painfully across to her wardrobe and dragged out the battered old suitcase she had brought to the sumptuous home she was about to leave forever. For leave she must, and before another hour passed.

Where she was going she did not know. Anywhere — anywhere to get away from a horrible situation, and from Ralph Morris. Shudder after shudder shook her as she thought of his evil, scheming face; his threats, his command that she see him to-morrow, to make plans for their future together. Better death—better even the prison with which he had threatened her. Oh, what a simple, confiding, blinded victim she had been! And what a price she was paying for her folly—would pay, too, as long as she lived.

With hands that shook so violently that she could scarcely use them, Kayce tore off the lovely garments she was wearing. Hardly able to bear her weight upon the strained ligaments of her leg, she forced herself to stand while clothing herself once more in the shabby clothes that were her own. Her bag she must leave behind. She had not the strength to carry it.

But there were letters—papers belonging to her mother. That sweet, honorable mother whose heart would have broken had she known to what deception her child had stooped. They mustn't be left behind. Burn them. If things went too bad, there was always one way out... And not a sign must be on her person to drag the honorable name of Merriman in the dust.

On her knees before the grate, Kayce kindled a little fire with some scrap paper, then began to unfold the faded letters as she took them from the old, tattered envelopes. They would burn better this way...

All at once a sentence, a name, caught her eye and stopped her hand as it moved toward the blaze. She peered closer, then leaped to her feet, turning on all the lights in the room. For a half hour she read, amazement, relief, indescribable joy, all chasing each other across her youthful countenance.

The door opened. Mrs. Barclay appeared again, her manner apologetic.

"I didn't want to disturb you, honey," she said softly, although she stared curiously at the girl in street

clothes. "But your grandfather just won't rest till he knows for sure that you are not hurt. I wonder if you could go in his room for a minute or so?"

There was no answer, but a radiant-eyed, smiling girl dashed quickly past her, running swiftly toward the study. Forgotten was the injured foot. Forgotten, too, was all sorrow, remorse or terror. Kayce opened her grandfather's door and went in, dropping on her knees beside his chair, her bright head resting against the thin old shoulder.

"Grandy, darling," she murmured, her lips caressing his wrinkled cheek. "I've got a long, long story to tell you. I want you to listen carefully, then I'd like to hear all over again how much you love me. Because there's nothing in the world that I prize more than—that..."

AT exactly four o'clock the next afternoon, Ralph Morris was admitted into the Collister house by a polite old butler, who took his hat and cane.

"The Senator said you was to come direct to his study, sir," grinned the old servitor. "They's all in there with him."

"You look as if you had heard something very wonderful, Amos," Ralph remarked, as he prepared to mount the grand stairway.

"I has, sir, I has," chuckled Amos, his white teeth glistening in his dark face. "There's goin' to be big doin's in this here house 'fore long, Mister Morris, sir. But it ain't for me to tell it. You'll hear when you see 'em all."

Bewildered at this information, Ralph ascended to the second floor. The study door was ajar. He saw Kayce first. She was sitting on a couch, and Derry Trent was beside her, his arm around her shoulders. They were both laughing as if at something very amusing.

Enraged at the sight, Ralph entered the room, and was immediately stopped by a peremptory order from the old Senator, whose countenance was anything but that of a dying man.

"You needn't come any farther, Morris," came the sharp command. "I only wished to inform you of certain developments in my household, and then I shall ask you to leave immediately, and never dare enter my doors again."

"Why—er—Senator Collister—I—er — don't understand," sputtered the man, glaring at Kayce as he spoke. How dared the little impostor look at him so insolently, so self-assured. "If this—er—person you call your granddaughter has been talking about me, there are things I can tell, too. Things that have just come to Randall and me, sir. We were fooled about the girl—"

"That's enough, Morris," cut in the old man sternly. "As it happens, Kathleen *is* my granddaughter! She was left with the Merrimans by her father, who called her Kayce, using his wife's two initials to form the name—K. C., you understand. I have every proof I need. All his letters to the kindly people who raised my little girl as their own. And now—get out of this house at once! I shall have a new attorney call upon you and Randall to take charge of my affairs. You may inform your fellow conspirator that I shall not refuse to pay the reward I offered him to locate my grandchild, but afterward we hope never to see either of you again. That's all."

Stunned beyond the power of speech, Ralph Morris descended the

stairs. Old Amos met him with his hat and cane.

"They's tole you about the grand weddin' we're havin' here next week, ain't they, sir? Yes, indeed. Biggest time this here ole house ever seed."

And up in the study Kayce leaned back on the couch, her golden head resting against Derry's shoulder.

"I think I'm the happiest person in this wonderful world," she whispered to the adoring lover beside her. "I still think it must be a dream, Derry. Tell me it isn't—that I won't wake and find myself like I was — yesterday!" She shivered slightly at the memory.

His lips closed down on hers and clung there. Both were entirely oblivious of the presence of an aged man who regarded them with satisfied, grateful eyes.

"I'm the one who feels as though he's dreaming, darling," Derry murmured between his kisses. "Just think of this time next week—you and I together forever and forever. If it is a dream, sweetheart, don't let me ever awake from it!"

Wanderer

I MUST have died, the day you left me,
Telling me some day you would return;
You smiled and said your farewell gayly
And knew I'd yearn.

I must have died, the day you wandered,
Far from my side and the love I gave;
You took it lightly, laughed and squandered
The heart of a slave.

But I must have lived, that day, returning,
You came once more to ease my pain;
For in the faith of a torn heart yearning,
I was born again!

—Bert Murray Fliegman

His eyes said more plainly than words, "You are afraid of me!" She smiled deliberately . . .

The Loyal Heart

Through the aching void of their separation she heard his call—"Little Louise!" Would her pride let her answer?

By Ruby M. Ayres

"GIVE him up!" her family insisted when Louise, engaged to Trevor Bruce, found herself neglected and inconsiderately treated. But Louise, loving him with all her heart, did not believe that their suspicions about him were justified.

Then one evening, when her fiancé had told her he had "an important engagement" which would prevent him dining with her, Louise found him in

his apartment alone with another woman—Mercia Swindon, new bride of her father's friend!

Still her great love fought for him, trying to find some explanation of his conduct.

When he called to see her the following morning it was Trevor Bruce and not Louise who broke the engagement.

"You wouldn't be happy with me, little Louise," he told her. "I'm no good."

But to her family Louise cried:

"I'll never give him up, all my life! You'll see!"

Agatha, her aunt, took her to Italy, where she met Silas, a young Englishman, who fell madly in love with her. When they returned to America Silas accompanied them.

At a dinner to which Silas had taken her Louise raised her eyes to see, across the room staring at her—Trevor!

CHAPTER VIII

FOR one instant Louise lost her self control; her hand fell from her partner's shoulder, her feet seemed to stop moving. Then with a violent effort she forced herself to go on again.

Silas looked down at her quickly.

"Anything wrong? I thought—"

"Oh, no, no—I just twisted my ankle. It's all right. Nothing—please go on."

It was a dream—or a nightmare. The many lights, the sound of the music, and the consciousness that somewhere close at hand was the one man who had ever mattered in her life.

She did not glance in his direction again, and she kept up a running conversation with Silas, looking up at him and laughing more than was quite necessary. Would Trevor have spoken to her? He would have bowed at any rate; it turned her cold to think how formally he would have bowed had she given him the chance.

And once he had held her in his arms.

Back at the Neilsons' table Rhoda said, "Trevor's here, Louise, and he seems unattached. It won't do to ask him to join us, I suppose?"

Louise forced herself to meet her friend's eyes.

"Why not? Just because we were once engaged—"

Rhoda shrugged her thin shoulders.

"Well, it's your funeral," she observed laconically, and then, "Oh, but he's got some people with him. Who are they, do you know?"

Louise glanced across the room.

"I don't know."

Thank God it was not Mercia Swindon at all events. Louise felt she could not have borne to see them together.

The evening wore on. Louise danced and danced.

"You'll be tired out," Silas protested.

There was a worried line between his eyes; he could not understand Louise to-night, she was so excited—almost noisy. But she only laughed. "Dancing never tires me. I love it."

She had carefully avoided being the odd one of the party to be left alone at the table, but in the end it was unavoidable.

"Mind! Of course I don't mind," she protested when Rhoda apologized for leaving her. "I've got a few running repairs to do," she added flippantly glancing at herself in the tiny mirror from her vanity bag. What difference could it possibly make if she was left alone for a short time? What did it matter? And yet when she found

Trevor at her elbow she knew she had been expecting him to come—knew it was what she had dreaded.

"May I have a dance?"

She glanced up at him, and her heart seemed to give a great throb and then stand still. He was just the same—the faint lines about his eyes that had been such a cause of sarcasm with her father, but which she loved—his half-cynical smile . . .

"Why, of course." She finished powdering her nose and rose to her feet. How odd to feel his arm around her again; she tried to steel her body against it, and was only conscious of the fact that it was here that she belonged—it was as if she had come home after a long and wearisome journey.

THERE were more people dancing now. Rhoda passed with Silas, and as she met Louise's eyes, she raised her brows in cynical inquiry. Louise knew that she must be telling Silas all about it, and did not care.

"Do you hear what they are playing?" Trevor asked.

"No, there are so many new pieces."

"This is not a new one. You and I have danced to it before. It's 'Louise'."

"Oh!" She had known all along what it was; remembered that it had been played that night when Mercia and Trevor met again.

A member of the band had come to the edge of the platform and was singing the refrain:

"Wonderful, oh it's wonderful, to be in love with you—
Beautiful, you're so beautiful—you thrill me through and through.
Every little breeze seems to whisper 'Louise,'
Birds in the trees seem to twitter 'Louise.'
Each little rose tells me it knows I love you—love you!
Every little beat that I feel in my heart,
Seems to repeat what I felt at the start—
Each little sigh tells me that I adore you, Louise..."

Trevor was humming the air under his breath and looking down at Louise with a half frown.

Six months since he had seen her, and she had changed. What was it—was she thinner? older? more serious? grown up?

Prettier than he had remembered her anyway, and he had remembered her with surprising faithfulness—for him at least, who had never been faithful to one woman for long at a time.

Just to see and hear you is joy I never knew;
But to be so near you, thrills me through and through...
Any one can see why I wanted your kiss—
It had to be, but the wonder is this—
Can it be true, some one like you could love me, Louise?

She *had* loved him too—poor little girl, and she—well—she still had the power to stir him—make him half regret—

She raised her eyes suddenly to his face.

"Sentimental words, aren't they?" she said lightly with a little grimace.

"I thought you used to like them," Trevor answered.

"Did I? A long while ago then. I've changed."

"Yes," he agreed. "You have."

With a sudden movement which she could not resist, he swept her out of the ballroom to the lounge outside.

"Do you mind?" he questioned. "I'm tired."

"I think I'll go back to the Neilsons."

"They're all dancing. Rhoda's thinner than ever, isn't she? How she can imagine she's beautiful, beats me."

"Does she imagine she is?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "I suppose so, or she wouldn't pose so. Shall we sit here?" He sat down beside her on a couch, and leaned back, still softly humming the air of the refrain that followed them from the ballroom.

"Each little sigh, tells me that I adore you—Louise."

She was making him quite sentimental. He sat up briskly.

"What have you been doing with yourself all this time?"

She laughed. "It's not very long—only six months. Agatha and I were in Switzerland for nearly three."

"Oh—Agatha! She always loathed me."

"I don't think so. She's a dear, anyway."

There was a moment's silence.

"Who's the long, lanky chap with you?" Trevor asked abruptly.

"He's an Englishman. We met him at Lugano."

SHE felt his eyes upon her, and made a little movement as if to rise. "I think we ought to go back. It's not fair to run away from one's party. Aren't you with friends, too?"

"I didn't come with them; I came alone. Will you have a cigarette?"

"No, thank you."

"Did you discard the vice of smoking when you discarded me?"

Her brown eyes met his steadily.

"Did I discard you?" she asked a little uncertainly.

He frowned, then laughed.

"Tell me—what did you think when you heard about—well—I suppose you heard."

"You mean about you and Mercia?" Louise hesitated, searching round in her bewildered mind for suitable words. "Well, if you love each other I don't think any one can blame you, but I was sorry for Lionel Swindon."

The cigarette was between his lips but he made no attempt to light it.

"And if we don't love each other?" he asked.

Louise did not answer, and he looked at her with the half cynical smile she had never understood even while she had loved it.

"You're not so grown up as I thought," he said. "I suppose you still believe that if a man and a woman go off the rails together it's for love, and for no other reason."

"I suppose so. I don't know. Need we talk about it?"

"I am interested to know what you think."

Louise moistened her lips; odd how dry and hot they were.

"I think she is very pretty," she said with a feeling of utter helplessness. She felt like a tired swimmer who has for long made a gallant fight for land, and who is at last conscious of sinking. With a great effort she roused herself to fresh defiance.

"When are you going to be married?" she asked.

That was well done; nobody would ever guess from the tone of her voice what those words cost her—she was sure that even Trevor could not guess.

He had found a match now and was lighting his cigarette.

"I'm *not* going to be married," he returned bluntly.

"Not—?"

He laughed. "Why should I? She doesn't expect it any more than I do."

"Not—expect it. Then why—?"

He looked away from her. "You're

not grown up at all, little Louise," he said quite gently.

"Little Louise"—if only he had not said that; it was like tearing open a great rent in one's heart—a carefully mended rent—leaving one with all the laborious, agonizing work to do over again!

Louise stood up. "I must go back. They will wonder where I am."

"I think they all know. The fact that you and I are not bitter enemies seemed to intrigue them." He rose also, and as they walked back to the ballroom together he said suddenly, "When you're older and wiser, Louise, you'll understand that very often love and divorce are not even on a nodding acquaintance, and are never likely to be. Here comes the attenuated Rhoda."

Rhoda deserted Silas directly she saw them.

"Are you the cat that walked alone, Trevor," she demanded languidly. "Because if so, come and fill in at our table. I hate an odd number."

"Delighted, if you can put up with me."

Louise had joined Silas; he looked a little pale, she thought, and with sudden compunction she slipped a hand through his arm.

"I believe I'm really tired at last," she said with a sigh.

"Are you too tired to finish this dance with me?"

"Oh, no."

WHEN they were in the center of the crowded room Silas said bluntly:

"That's the fellow you were engaged to."

"Yes. I suppose Rhoda told you."

"I wonder he's got the nerve to speak to you."

She looked up at him, trying to laugh.

"Oh, but why? We haven't met for six months. Is there any reason why we shouldn't be polite to one another?"

He made no answer, but when the dance was over he said bluntly:

"Don't d a n c e with him again, Louise."

Louise laughed. "I don't like jealous people," she teased him, and then instantly repenting, squeezed his hand. "Don't spoil my evening."

"Will it spoil it if you don't dance with him again?"

"You know I did not mean that."

She left him impatiently and sat down at the table.

Trevor was between Rhoda and another girl, laughing and talking as if he had not a care in the world.

So he was not going to marry Mercia!

Louise tried to understand and failed utterly. If two people who had done what they had done did not love one another, then why . . . She met his eyes across the table, and roused herself to laugh and talk. He must not think it mattered to her whether he married Mercia or not; he must not think that he mattered at all.

Supper was a noisy affair. Rhoda drank too much champagne and grew sleepy and inclined to be sulky.

She sat with her elbows on the table, rouging her lips and arguing about everything, and Trevor seemed to be doing his best to annoy her. Louise glanced at her watch. Only eleven—what a long evening it had seemed!

A waiter approached and spoke to Silas. "Mr. Brunton, sir?"

"Yes—why?"

"There is a gentleman in the lounge who wishes to speak to you. He will not come in."

"To speak to me?" Silas rose and looked at Louise. "Will you excuse me—" he went hurriedly away.

"I suppose it *is* a gentleman," Rhoda said nastily. "Not his girl friend."

She gave him her hand with a gesture of defiance, but he turned it over and gently kissed the soft palm

Silas returned hurriedly; he looked upset.

"It's Wheeler—my father's New York agent. He's had a cable. My father's dangerously ill and I'm to go at once. There's a boat to-night which I can catch if I go now. I'm sorry to spoil the party, but you understand—there's no time to lose."

He looked only at Louise, spoke only to her.

"I'll write or cable—" He seized her hand in a hard grip. "It's not good-by," he said under his breath so that only she could hear, and he was gone.

Louise looked a little pale and upset.

"Don't you think one of us ought to go with him and see him off?" she said. "It seems unkind—letting him go like that."

"Rot!" Rhoda was scornful. "Let him see himself off. I don't suppose he cares how soon the old man dies as long as the will's in order. Fill my glass, please, Trevor."

But Trevor had risen and gone round to Louise.

"I've got a car here. If you would like to go after him—"

"Oh, thank you. I—" She half rose, then sat down again. "I think perhaps I'd better not. He'll be so rushed anyway."

BUT that was not what she was thinking of, but of driving alone with Trevor Bruce once again; a thing not to be borne or even contemplated. The rest of the party were

dancing again, and she and Trevor were alone at the table.

He sat down beside her.

"Is that to be my successor, Louise?" he asked.

"Oh—" she caught her breath, but smiled as she met his gaze. "Well, I'm rather seriously thinking about it."

"Your father will be pleased. Plenty of money this time, if not much affection or any other attraction."

Louise laughed. "Perhaps sometimes love has no more to do with marriage than it has to do with divorce," she said calmly.

"I see I have taught you something."

"A great many things. Give me a cigarette, please."

She did not want one, but it was something to do, something to occupy her hands and prevent him from seeing how they trembled.

Every little rose tells me it knows I love you...
Every little beat that I feel in my heart...

The words were running through Bruce's head and would not be dismissed; silly words to be so haunting. He had been a fool to seek out Louise to-night just because he had been feeling down on his luck.

If he had not run into Donald earlier in the evening it would not have happened. He had inquired casually after Louise, more to ride over a sort of awkwardness in the conversation between himself and her brother than because he had any real desire to know, and Donald had told him she was dancing and named the place. Donald had also mentioned Silas Brunton, and Bruce had been conscious of a sudden overwhelming desire to see the man who had usurped his place.

"Usurped"? That was a strong word—the fellow had merely stepped into a position which he himself had voluntarily vacated. All the same he felt a great curiosity to see for himself what the fellow was like. So he had changed into evening clothes.

It had been a mistake—he realized that angrily now as he sat beside the girl who was to have been his wife, and felt old memories crowding upon him again. She was an adorable little thing—he had always realized that about Louise, even after their engagement had come to an end, and more than once he had wished in an amused, half-scornful way that things could have been different.

But obviously the Ethiopian cannot change his skin, and he would only have made her wretched if he had gone on and married her; as he had said, he was not the constant type—marriage with any woman would fret him to death.

Even with Mercia! He shook his shoulders with a sudden feeling of distaste.

No, it was better as it was—one had sometimes to be cruel to be kind, if he *had* been cruel! Though looking at Louise now he asked himself if she *had* minded so very much after all?

HE had never seen her looking better—she had never appeared so attractive. That new sort of grown-upness suited her, and gave her poise and dignity. He wondered what she would do if he tried to kiss her—and if she had yet allowed Brunton to kiss her. The thought brought with it a curious dog-in-the-manger sort of jealousy that irritated him. He said abruptly:

"You'll live in England, I suppose."

"We haven't thought about it."

He sat silent for a little, watching the dancers, and Louise was glad not to have to talk, glad to have a short respite. She was conscious of extreme exhaustion; she was so tired that she could have closed her eyes gladly and slept. The cigarette smoldered and went out between her fingers and she put it down, wondering if Trevor had noticed that she had hardly touched it.

"Would you care to dance?" he asked suddenly.

"I'd rather not, if you don't mind. I'm really tired."

"Shall I take you home?"

"Oh, no, thank you." Too much energy in that refusal; she colored, meeting the smile in his eyes that said more plainly than words, "You are afraid of me."

But in the end she was obliged to go home with him. By some mistake Silas had not arranged for the car to come back for her, and there was no room in Rhoda's.

"Trevor can take you," she said maliciously. "It will be quite like old times for you both, or are you afraid of him?" she taunted Louise. "He's a Gay Lothario you know—"

Louise felt that she hated her.

"It's kind of you to let me drive you home," Trevor murmured as they started away. "I'm glad to have this opportunity of saying good-by to you."

"Good-by—?" she drew her wraps more closely around her. "Of course! You are going abroad."

She remembered that people always went abroad after they had got mixed up in a divorce case, went abroad and stayed there till things had blown over; and yet—Trevor had said he was not going to marry Mercia! Perhaps he was running away from her—running away from his responsibilities.

The thought was a shock. In spite of everything that had happened she still had faith in Trevor—a queer sort of faith that loyally defended him in her thoughts.

"I hope you'll be very happy wherever you go," she said.

"Happy!" Trevor threw back his handsome head and roared with laughter.

They had turned into Riverside Drive, and suddenly he drew to the side of the road and stopped the car. "History repeats," he said mockingly. "Wasn't it somewhere here that I told you I loved you? Well, what could be more appropriate than I should bid you an eternal farewell in the same spot!"

Louise felt her face burning. He was laughing at her—making fun of the thing that had been such a tragedy to her, but less than nothing to him.

For a moment she felt her composure deserting her, then with a tremendous effort she rallied. If he did not care then neither would she! She would fight him with his own weapons—give him indifference for indifference—laugh if he could laugh.

"You're very melodramatic!" she said lightly. "Why need we say good-by at all? The world is not so large that we are unlikely to meet again, and I am not thinking of dying, if you mean that—"

"God forbid!" There was sudden angry emotion in his voice. "On the other hand," he added, with a sudden return of his old mocking tones, "it is quite probable that I may break my neck one night driving at eighty miles an hour when the wine is in and the wit out—"

She could feel his eyes upon her. "Will you come to my funeral, little Louise, and bring a wreath of forget-me-nots?"

"Oh, something *far* more costly than

forget-me-nots?" she answered lightly. "I should search the city for the rarest and most expensive orchids."

"I abominate orchids!"

"Do you? Then you shall *choose* what you will have, and I'll store it up in my memory for the future sad occasion!" She was as mocking now as he was, and her eyes were bright with excitement.

TREVOR, looking down at her, suddenly said, "I shall kiss you if you look at me like that!"

"Will you? I don't think you will," she answered calmly. "I'm no longer the little girl you used to bully and neglect."

"And make love to," he added audaciously.

"And make love to, as you say," Louise agreed unemotionally. "Gracious! what years ago it seems since I used to sit at home and wait patiently for the telephone to ring to inform me that I was once more remembered. I ought to have boxed your ears and shown you the door," she added.

"It would have been better for us both if you had," he agreed moodily.

"You mean it would have been worse—for me at any rate," she corrected him quickly. "Because I might have married you then. I think you're the type of man who would insist on marrying a girl who boxed your ears and showed you the door—and then think how miserable I should have been."

"Why would you have been miserable?"

She considered a moment.

"I think," she said at last, carefully choosing her words, "that I should have got tired of you, perhaps more quickly than you would of me—because I should still have grown up to what I am now even if we *had* been married. And then I should have understood you as you really are—and not as I thought you were."

"Is there such a vast difference?"

"Yes."

"Tell me what the difference is?"

"It's difficult to explain without hurting your feelings."

He laughed, "Good Lord! Do you still credit me with feelings?"

"I did, but if you haven't any—well, the chief difference is that the man I thought you were could never have done what you did—"

"Meaning Mercia?"

"Yes."

"Well—go on."

"I don't think there's any need. And, anyway, it's all over and done with, so why talk about it?"

He was silent for a moment, then he said suddenly: "And if I tell you that I did not—that I never deserved to be dragged through the divorce court?"

LOUISE sat silent, staring at the rows of lights by the river and thinking of the night she had climbed the stairs to Trevor Bruce's apartment, only to find—and now he was telling her he was not guilty!

"If you say so, of course I believe you," she said with stiff lips.

He laughed noisily.

"In that tone of voice? My dear Louise, why not call me a liar and have done with it? Never mind," he added more quietly, as she made a little involuntary movement. "We'll leave it at that, shall we?"

She made no answer, and he sat silent for some minutes, his thoughts turning unwillingly to just such another night as this, when he had stopped the car almost in the same spot, and taken Louise in his arms.

"You wouldn't care to marry me, I suppose?" That was how he had proposed to her, and she had answered:

"I would—if you love me—"

Had he loved her? Did he perhaps love her still? Rot! The moonlight was getting on his nerves. It was that warm, spring-like feeling in the air that had got into his blood too—was mounting to his head like wine.

Trevor drove the clutch home with a violent jerk the car leaped forward.

"I think home is the best place for you, little Louise," he said in a queer voice, and Louise answered as she stifled a yawn, "Yes, I am frightfully tired! I've had so many late nights—"

They did not speak again till they reached the house, and then Trevor said with a half laugh:

"Your father would have a fit if he knew I had brought you home, I suppose."

"Oh, no! I'm gradually educating him. He's getting quite broad-minded."

"About Brunton, for instance!"

"I suppose Silas is the great exception. I think he's quite popular."

"So Donald tells me."

She looked up swiftly.

"Donald?"

"Yes. I ran into him this evening. He is in town for a dinner or something—"

"I didn't know."

"Perhaps I should not have mentioned it. I did not mean to—it slipped out."

Louise was thinking rapidly—had Donald told him where she was? She remembered she had mentioned where she was going with Silas in a letter to her brother written only yesterday.

And if so, had Trevor deliberately planned to meet her? What a foolish thought! Supposing it was a true one, what could have been his idea? Just to see her suffer perhaps—just to watch her futile pain as a boy watches the futile pain of a butterfly through whose helpless body he has just thrust a pin.

Well, thank God she had not given him that satisfaction, would never give it to him again!

She stifled another pretended yawn.

"Well, I must go, before I fall romantically asleep in your car." She held her hand to him. "Good night, Trevor."

He took her hand in both his, held it for a moment, then turned it gently over and kissed the soft palm.

"Good-by, little Louise."

Louise walked composedly up the garden path to the front door, conscious that he was standing there in the moonlight watching her. It was a little difficult to fit the key in the lock, because her hand shook so, but she managed it at last, turning again for a moment before she shut the door to call a last "Good night!"

It was only later, when she was safely in her own room, staring at her white face in the mirror, that she remembered Trevor Bruce had not answered her good night with good night, but with good-by!

CHAPTER IX

IT was a week later that Lionel Swindon came to dinner.

Agatha protested to Louise's father that it was an unwise move.

"Even if Louise has got over it—and you seem very sure she has—isn't it tempting Providence? Opening an old wound?"

The pater said "Pshaw" in his most scornful manner.

"My dear Agatha, I understand Louise. She is one of those people who

like the war carried into the enemy's camp—carried right into the very heart of the enemy's camp."

Agatha stared at him. "Now what in the world do you mean by that?" she demanded blankly.

The pater had not the least idea what he meant, and so he cut the conversation short by saying he must run for his train, and Agatha was left alone.

Lionel Swindon coming to dinner! To her still rather old-fashioned mind the thing seemed hardly decent. To be sure he himself was in no way to blame for what had happened—or was he?

Agatha's bitter experience of a husband had taught her to look to the masculine side for the fault of any marriage shipwreck. No doubt Swindon had neglected his wife—he was considerably older than she—no doubt he had left her to run about and amuse herself as she saw fit, and her unguarded steps had led her back to Trevor. Well, if Louise had no objection to meeting Swindon again, there could be no harm in it, but *had* Louise no objection?

Agatha by no means shared her brother's optimistic view that Louise had quite recovered from her love for Trevor Bruce; sometimes, watching her niece, she could not rid herself of the conviction that the girl was acting all the time—pretending to be what she was not—pretending not to feel something which she felt with every fiber of her body.

Louise came into the room at the moment, very smart and pretty, and smoking a cigarette.

"Lionel Swindon is dining with us to-night," she said.

"So I have just been told, dear."

Louise touched her shoulder caressingly.

"And you thoroughly disapprove, don't you? I can see it in your face, hear it in your voice. Oh, but, Agatha darling, *why?* I like him—I always liked him."

"I know, but—"

"There are no 'buts'," Louise declared lightly. "I know what you are thinking, but you're quite wrong." She hesitated a moment, then added deliberately, "If it will comfort you at all to know it, Trevor brought me home from that dance—all by himself—a week ago."

"Louise!"

The girl laughed. "You see!—and what is more we danced together—twice I think it was, and he had supper at our table." She sat down on the arm of Agatha's chair. "You all seem to lose sight of the fact that in the last seven months I've grown up," she went on more seriously. "When I was a child I spoke as a child—but when I became a man—or woman—it's the same thing—I put away childish things. There! I think that's rather a clever explanation."

"If it's a true one," Agatha said bluntly. "And yet," she pursued deliberately, "it's not so very long ago since you told me you had not given Trevor up—and would never give him up to your dying day."

Louise bit her lip, but the next moment she was laughing.

"It's not so very long since the boys were declaring they would both be engine drivers when they grew up," she said lightly. "They would not like to be reminded of it now. Besides aren't you all rather forgetting poor Silas?"

Agatha frowned. "When you say 'poor Silas' in that tone of voice, it's the answer to everything."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that no woman speaks of the man she loves with that sort of pitying tolerance, also that I don't believe you care two rows of bent pins for Silas, and that you don't mean to marry him."

Louise looked away out of the window. There was an almond tree in full blossom outside, pink and lovely, and quite incongruously she thought of Trevor's mocking words, "Will you come to my funeral, little Louise, and bring a wreath of forget-me-nots?"

Supposing he were to die? . . . She stood up abruptly.

"Well, I know it's no use talking. You're a very obstinate female, but I love you all the same." She dropped a light kiss on the elder woman's cheek and went away.

But Agatha sat for a long time, her eyes on the almond tree that had caught Louise's attention, and her thoughts with the man whose death years ago had brought her freedom, but never forgetfulness.

He had been cruel to her, he had made her unhappy, but she never saw anything beautiful even now, but she thought of him—never watched a sunset but that the old intolerable pain came back to her, and the longing for his footstep—his voice.

She had thought Louise was like that too, the stupid, faithful kind; perhaps after all she had been wrong.

LIONEL SWINDON came to dinner. He looked just the same, was Louise's first thought, and then she realized that it had been foolish to expect to find him altered. Perhaps it was because she felt that she herself had changed so much that it seemed odd he should not have changed too.

He shook hands with her gravely, a little pleasurable smile in his kind eyes, and then they went in to dinner, and the pater monopolized most of the conversation.

He always imagined that no matter who else was present, he was the only one whose views any one wished to listen to; he thoroughly enjoyed the sound of his own voice, and when Louise and Agatha left the two men to their cigars, he was declaiming loudly about the Government, and fondly imagining himself to be getting by far the best of an argument. Whereas there was really no argument at all, seeing that Swindon was merely listening to him and politely throwing in a word or two of assent now and again.

In the drawing-room Louise sat down at the piano. She did not feel in a mood to talk, and Agatha took up a book, but after a moment Louise's hands fell from the keys, and she sat staring before her with far-away eyes.

What did Lionel Swindon really think about it all? Did he mind about Mercia? Had he loved her?

Perhaps Rhoda and all the other girls she knew were right when they said in their young cynicism that there was no such thing as love—not the kind that lasted anyway. She wished she could talk to Lionel Swindon about it—he was one of those who seemed to understand. She looked up suddenly to find Agatha's eyes upon her.

There was a little silence, then Louise said impulsively:

"*You* don't believe that love lasts, do you?"

There was an uncomfortable silence.

Agatha threw a cigarette into the fire and lit another before she answered.

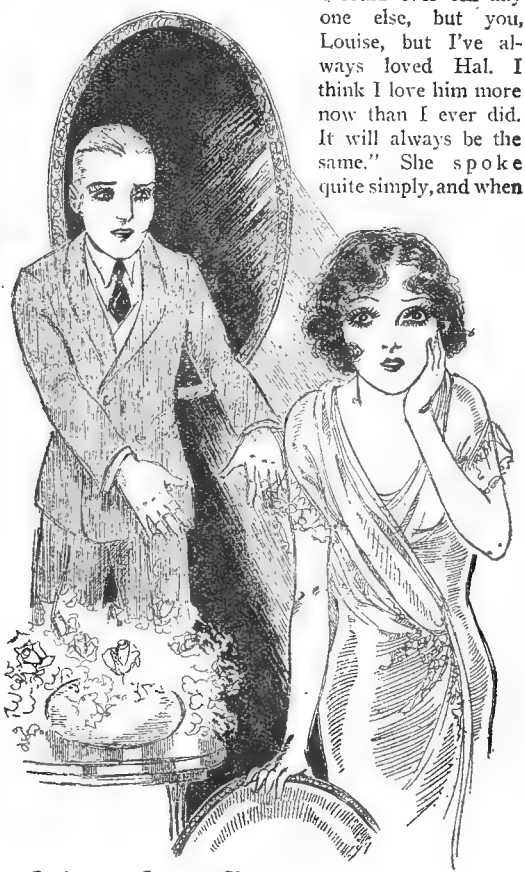
"It all depends what kind of love you mean."

"Well—between a man and a woman, of course."

Agatha's mind gave a queer little twist. She was naturally a reserved woman; even at the height of her unhappiness she had never made a confidant of any one—she had just suffered in silence. She had allowed every one to think her husband's death had been nothing but a relief. In a way she was oddly ashamed because in spite of everything he had meant—still meant—so much to her.

And now this girl—little more than a child still, who perhaps held more of her affection than any one else—was groping unhappily along the path which most women tread some time or another—trying to find an answer to the eternal question to which no answer has ever yet been found.

"Do you believe that love lasts?" Louise asked again half apologetically. "I suppose it's a silly question to ask any one—every one has such different experiences—but I have so often wondered what you think about it all."



"Look here, Louise. If he goes he'll never come back!"

For a moment she was more like her old self than she had been since they came back from Italy; a little wistful, and very young. Agatha was conscious of a very real longing to help her favorite niece.

"Well," she began bluntly, "I've never told any one else—I don't think I could ever tell any one else, but you, Louise, but I've always loved Hal. I think I love him more now than I ever did. It will always be the same." She spoke quite simply, and when she stopped speaking she drew a quick breath as if she had found it a relief to tell some one the thing that had lain secret in her heart for so long.

Louise stood up, her face a little flushed, her eyes warm with sympathy. "Yes," she said, half in a whisper. "That's it—it will always be the same—whatever happens, won't it? It's like that with me too—no matter how much I pretend—but I can only tell you—nobody else! I couldn't bear any one else to know!"

"Louise!"

Agatha half rose as if to go to her, but at that moment Swindon spoke in the doorway. "May I come in? Or will it be disturbing confidences?"

"Oh, please come in."

AND in a flash the little moment of reality was over, and Louise was herself once more, and Agatha cold and impassive as the world knew her. But it was unintentionally that presently Agatha slipped away to see what was detaining the pater in his study, and Louise and Lionel Swindon were left alone.

He stood up then, quickly, as if he had been waiting for this moment, and held out his hand to the girl.

"I've been waiting to say it all evening, my dear—that I'm so sorry for all—all that has happened."

Louise winced as if he had hurt her, but she smiled and laid her hand in his. "I'm sorry too. I'm afraid we've both been badly hurt."

"You're very brave."

She shook her head. "Not really. Just the most awful coward."

"And we're still to be friends?"

"Oh, of course!"

"I'm glad. I thought perhaps you have been blaming me."

"It was not your fault."

He shook his head. "I don't know. Perhaps it's easy to be wise after the event, but looking back I think if I had been different—I was too old."

Louise answered quickly, "You're not old at all—and I think things *have* to happen—things we can't help." She tried to smile. "It's merciful that we can get over any trouble if we live long enough, isn't it?"

"Have you found that? I've often wondered—do you remember that day we met in the park—when we had tea together?"

"Yes."

"You said something to me then, that I have never forgotten."

"Did I? I expect I said a lot of foolish things. It seems such a long time ago, and I'm older and wiser now."

His eyes were very kind as he looked at her.

"We are never too old or too wise to stop caring, my dear," he said rather sadly. "And you said to me then when we were speaking of your broken engagement: 'I still love him, whatever happens I shall always love him.' All these months I've been remembering that, and hoping you were not too badly hurt."

Louise's cheeks flamed, and for a moment her eyes fell, unable to bear the scrutiny of his, then she managed a little laugh.

"Did I say that? It was very silly and melodramatic, but I've forgotten I said it—I hope you will forget it too."

Swindon had been holding her hand, but now he gently released it.

"I am glad," he said. "I am very glad if you have forgotten—Bruce is not worth loving."

Louise shivered.

"Well," she said with an effort. "Can't we talk about something more cheerful?"

"After to-day we'll never mention it again, but I just wanted to say that Mercia will be all right, whatever hap-

pens. I mean money—I've seen to that."

"I was sure you would."

She wondered if he knew that Mercia and Trevor were not going to be married, but before she could ask, Agatha and the pater came back.

But lying awake that night Louise thought of Swindon's words.

Not worth loving! Of course he would say that; he had every justification for saying it, and yet—deep down in her heart something passionately denied it. Trevor was not all bad—there had been moments when he had seemed so dear, so real . . .

Louise pressed her cheek into the pillow and closed her eyes.

"I will not think of him. I will go to sleep—I *will* go to sleep," she told herself fiercely. But though she counted sheep coming through a gap in a hedge—as years ago an old nurse had taught her to do—till she was sure that the room must be crowded with the silly creatures, sleep would not come, Swindon's words went on ringing madly through her brain.

"He's not worth loving—not worth it—not worth it."

CHAPTER X

SILAS cabled to Louise that his father had died and that as soon as business matters could be arranged, he was returning to New York.

Louise showed the cable to Agatha.

"I must write and tell him not to come," she said.

Agatha nodded. "Yes, that will be the kindest way," she agreed.

Since the night Swindon came to dinner they had not spoken of that moment of revelation when each had seen into the other's heart. There was no need to speak of it—they understood without further explanation that the old relationship between them was changed forever—that each had found a friend, absolutely to be trusted.

"I suppose Silas will be very rich now," Agatha said.

"I suppose so."

Money did not interest Louise—she had never been able to understand Rhoda and other girls when they evinced such anxiety to know the size of a man's banking account. They all frankly envied her because of Silas Brunton. "You'll be able to keep a yacht, and half a dozen cars, and go all over the world!" so Rhoda had said. "Of course he's not exactly an oil painting, but if you bring him up properly he'll be quite easy to leave at home!"

"But I shouldn't care for a husband I wanted to leave at home," Louise had protested, half laughing, to which Rhoda had replied sharply that it was better than having a husband who wanted to leave *you* at home all the time!

Louise remembered that now—remembered also how Trevor Bruce had said to her the day their engagement was ended:

"If we married, you'd grow to hate me. I should go my own way—or want to—and it would be hell for you."

Would it have been a worse hell than the one to which he had condemned her as it was, she wondered? If they had been married, she would have known at least that he would come back to her if she was patient—but now she knew he would never come back—

It was not often Louise allowed herself to think along these lines—she had forced her mind to self-control and discipline—but just for a moment now she gave herself up to the tide of pain which she had kept so sternly in check.

Trevor would never come back to her—they had said good-by forever—

Agatha spoke again in her calm, sensible voice:

"I forgot to tell you—Donald rang up just now when you were out. He's in New York and is coming to lunch—he particularly wants to see you, he said."

LOUISE'S eyes brightened. Donald was her favorite brother, though she was reluctant to admit it, even to herself. Partly her favorite perhaps because of his unbounded affection and admiration for Trevor.

Agatha went on, "He seems to spend a great deal of his time coming to town. I'm sure I don't know when he does any studying. It's odd how unlike those twins are—Tony is so stable and studious."

Louise wanted to say, "Donald has more heart—he understands things—" but she kept silent. Even now it was not always easy to show her own point of view to Agatha.

Donald arrived just as lunch was ready. He looked rather serious and preoccupied.

"Look here," he said hurriedly to Louise as he kissed her, "I want to see you alone presently—keep the widow out of the way, can you?"

"Why, of course—we'll go out."

"No, we won't—I've got to get back this afternoon anyway. I'll come up to your room after lunch."

She caught his hand. "Don—you're not in any trouble?"

He shook his head. "Well—not *my* trouble anyway."

"Not yours?—then—who—"

But there was no time to answer. Agatha was calling them to lunch and complaining that everything would be cold.

Donald was quite cheerful during the meal. He laughed and told Agatha stories which he hoped would shock her, and watching him, Louise told herself that the vague premonition of trouble she had had as he kissed her was all nonsense, and that it would turn out to be something quite unimportant.

But later when he came to her room he was serious again—almost unhappy looking, and his voice sounded like his father's when he broke out bluntly:

"Look here, I dare say you'll be mad with me, but I can't help it, you've got to listen. You're the only one that can do anything to help him—" and then before she could speak he jerked out defiantly: "It's Trevor!"

"Trevor!"

"Yes." Donald was standing with his back to the door as if afraid she would try to escape. "I've seen a good deal of him lately, on and off. We were always pals, you know that, and I didn't see any reason why—because you and he—well, you know what I mean. Yesterday he came down to see me.

"I was surprised—he's never looked me up since you and he—I've always been the one to hunt him out—well, he came to say good-by."

"He's going away?" How silly—of course people only said good-by when they were going away! Louise tried to pull herself together. She felt as if her powers of thought and understanding were floating away from her—being tossed about like leaves in a gale, and that she could not recapture them.

"Yes. East, he said." Donald's face was red and distressed.

"He's in debt, of course, but he's not all bad whatever my father seems

to think. *You* ought to know that!" He accused her almost violently.

LOUISE sat down on the side of the bed. "Did he—does he know you were coming to see me?" she asked.

"Good Lord, no! What sort of a rotter do you take him for! He never mentioned your name—he'd shoot me if he knew I'd told you. I'm here because—look here, Louise, if he goes, he'll never come back—you mark my words!"

She stared at him helplessly.

"Never—come back—Donald?"

"He said he was through, and I don't wonder." Donald moved away from the door and walked over to the window, where he stared out with angry eyes at Louise's almond tree.

"He's had a pretty rotten time one way and another, and not altogether his own fault. Women never will let him alone—it's always been the same."

Louise moistened her dry lips. "I can't see what it's got to do with me," she said dully.

"Yes, you can—you know quite well you're the only one who's ever had any influence over him."

"Donald!" she began to laugh, helpless, bitter laughter. "Oh, how absurd!"

"It's true. I know him better than most people do, and I know you too. He'd rather die than admit it, but you're the only one who—look here, why do you think he hasn't married Mercia Swindon?"

Louise said bitterly, "I suppose because it wasn't necessary."

Donald went on, disregarding her. "It's because he doesn't care a damn for her—he never did—"

"Has he ever cared for any one but himself?"

"That sounds like dad. Don't be cynical, Louise, it doesn't suit you."

"I'm sorry, but I'm afraid if you want me to be interested in Trevor, it's too late."

That was pride speaking—pride which could not tolerate the thought that her brother should know or dare to guess at the humiliating truth.

She stood up, very white and unrelenting.

Donald stared at her for a moment. He seemed to be turning something over in his mind; then he said bluntly:

"Do you want him to blow his brains out? Because I believe that was what he meant when he told me he was through with everything. He's the kind to do it too—he'd get out that way rather than go on when there was nothing left for him!"

"He might try doing some honest work for a change," Louise said.

There was a little silence, then Donald said:

"I thought you'd understand. I might have known you wouldn't—women can't." He waited a moment, but as she did not speak he shrugged his shoulders and turned to the door. "Well, I'll be going—good-by—"

LOUISE did not move. She was telling herself that people who threatened to commit suicide never did it—but had Trevor threatened to? Of course he had not, he wasn't the kind. It was just Donald's imagination. Or was it a plot—a clumsy scheme on her brother's part to bring them together again?

If it was, it had failed—poor old Donald! Blinded to everything by his own deep affection for them both.

Fancy trying to make her believe that Trevor still cared for her! Had ever cared!

It was only she who had loved him—to her own disillusionment and pain.

Agatha knew what it meant—only Agatha understood what it was to love a man from whom one could never get satisfaction or happiness—

She heard her aunt's voice at the door. "Can I come in, Louise?"

"Oh, yes, dear."

Mrs. Lindsay looked a little disturbed.

"Is anything the matter with Donald? He went off so abruptly. He was almost rude to me."

"He came to lecture me about Trevor. It appears he is going abroad and Don thinks I ought to be able to prevent it."

"My dear child—"

"I know. It's silly, isn't it? But Don's so fond of him."

Suddenly her voice broke and she turned her face sharply away. Wasn't she "fond" of him too? If so weak a word could express what she felt!

AGATHA and Louise's father were dining out that night.

"If you would rather I stayed at home, I will!" Agatha said to Louise, but Louise refused.

"Of course not. I'm tired. I shall go to bed early."

But after her solitary dinner she sat down to write to Silas. It was a difficult task—cruel while the loss of his father was so recent—to say: "Don't come back to New York—I don't want you—" And yet for his sake she must do it. It was less cruel than allowing him to come all that long journey buoyed up with false hope.

She wrote a few lines, then sat idle, looking down at the words she had written, but seeing in their place her brother's angry accusation.

"I thought you'd understand. I might have known you wouldn't—women can't!"

Was Donald right, and was she wrong to let her pride stand between her and the man she loved? Yes, but he had not *said* that he wanted her, had shown no sign that he wanted her! How, then, could she go to him and say as her heart had always said: "I have not given you up. I will never give you up—"

And it was at that moment, as clearly as if he had been standing in the room behind her, she heard Trevor's voice:

"*Little Louise!*"

It was so distinct and so like a call that she started to her feet, a ready answer on her lips.

She stood staring around the room, bewildered. It had been so real—nobody had ever said "Little Louise" quite as Trevor said it—and yet—he was not there—there was nobody with her.

She was trembling from head to foot. Was this just some queer freak born of her own imagination, or had some strange affinity that still bound her and Trevor together in spite of their separation, warned her that he was in great need of her?

And suddenly she knew that she must go to him—even if this instinct was wrong—even if he laughed at her and sent her away—she must go in answer to that call which still seemed to be ringing through the empty room.

A Kiss for Colleen

How was Colleen to know the right kiss when it came? And if the kiss that stirred her most was the one she mustn't think of—

By Dorothy Lull

COLLEEN GUERNEY was about to be kissed. She waited, rigid, her shadowy blue eyes fixed on the cracked transom above Vergil Carew's smooth gray head. The gold *pince-nez*, slipping from the narrow bridge of Mr. Carew's nose, slithered across her cheek like a fragment of ice. The neat, gray mustache bent closer—

Now she had done it, just as she had always known she would! She stood alone in the hallway, her knuckles pressed against her quivering mouth, as Mr. Carew's departing footsteps clicked precisely down the front walk. A tremor swept her face. It was an eager, elfin face—a whimsical nose, a mouth like a pixy, and gay yet brooding eyes, blue and wistful, beneath black lashes. She lifted her chin defiantly. She ought to be glad, glad, instead of this queer, frozen feeling.

"Colleen!"

Pushing a black swirl of hair from her forehead with a helpless gesture, she opened the door to an inner room.

"Well, did you get it?" Mrs. Guerney, her wasted fingers picking at the cheap lace of her nightgown, flung the question at Colleen.

"No, I didn't, but—I've promised to marry him."

"Naturally! I knew you'd do that whenever he'd ask you; but why didn't you do as I told you? What's a hundred dollars to a man like Vergil Carew? Besides, if you're going to marry him—quick, Lottie, run out and stop him! Tell him I want to speak to him!"

At her words the girl lounging against the foot of the bed started forward.

"No!" Colleen blocked the doorway, her eyes points of blue flame, her slight body shaking. "You can't—not

after all he's done for us! I'm going to marry him. He's promised to send you out West and to put Lottie in that dramatic school she's so crazy about. Isn't that enough? I should think you'd see I can't let you ask him for more money now!"

"You and your everlasting pride!" The woman leaned forward, the scarlet disks on her ivory cheeks deepening. The sound of a distant motor broke the moment's silence. "There, he's gone! Want to know why I had to have that hundred now—to-night? Keep still, Lottie! I *will* tell her—she's so smart! Lottie's short a hundred dollars. When Miss Simpson gets back from her vacation next week she'll find it out. Now do you understand? What's your Mr. Carew going to say then? It was you that talked him into giving her the job in the first place!"

"Oh, Eunice!" Colleen ran to her stepmother. "Lottie, it isn't true! You couldn't do it!"

"Well, what if I did?" Lottie shook free, her eyes sullen, hard. "I knew you were going to marry him. Even you wouldn't be fool enough to turn down half a million; but I couldn't wait. I couldn't pass up a chance like that, when it meant trying out with the Superior Films, just because I didn't have any decent clothes. It wasn't my fault the judges were a bunch of crooks."

"You mean you stole a hundred dollars to buy clothes, just because you wanted to make an impression on those moving picture men who came through here last week? You—you counted on my marrying Mr. Carew to make it good? You—you—"

"Suppose she did!" Lottie's mother flared to the younger girl's defense. "You needn't bite her head off. It was her one big chance. You wouldn't let her go to him for it. I'm sick and tired of your high and mighty ways! Can't you see she's worried to death? She just told me to-night, and that's why I asked you to borrow it from him. He would never know."

"How soon do you have to have it, Lottie?" inquired Colleen.

"Miss Simpson's due on the 1st. If I don't get it back by the end of this week—"

Lottie shrugged, polishing her pink nails against her palm.

"I—I'll get the money. Don't worry, Eunice."

Colleen walked blindly to her own room and shut the door.

MONEY—it had always been money. Her father had been the minister of the small suburban church of which Mr. Carew had been the chief pillar. While Colleen was away, taking a business course, Dr. Guerney had married the pretty, delicate widow and brought her and her fifteen-year-old daughter to the parsonage, only to die himself a few months later, leaving the burden of their support on Colleen's slender shoulders.

It wasn't fair; but what else could she do? Eunice had no relatives. Inbred pride and loyalty to her father combined to make Colleen take over the entire responsibility. Eunice had been ill. There had been weeks when her bill at the drug store had been more than Colleen's salary. Instead of being a help, Lottie had been a growing expense and anxiety, with her taste for cheap finery and her aimless dreams of a stage career.

Despite Colleen's wounded pride, Mr. Carew had come forward again and again and insisted on paying off her accumulated debts. Now, after all he

had done for them during these last three years, Lottie had actually stolen from his bank, in which he had placed her for Colleen's sake. She had stolen, counting on this marriage!

Colleen dropped her face into her hands, fighting back the sobs. She could see him now as he had stood before her in the hall to-night.

"I want you to give me the right to help—always." His voice was neat and precise, like the whole of him. "The load's too heavy for you. I want you—to be my wife."

Well, why not? He was kind and generous. Eunice and Lottie would have what they needed; and Colleen—well, she respected him. After all, wasn't that enough? If it wasn't exactly the kind of love she'd read about in books, wasn't it enough? Yet she felt suddenly cold and frightened, deep inside, when she gave him his answer.

"So that's that!" He had accepted her surrender with characteristic finality. He moved on to the next consideration as if he had been conducting a directors' meeting. "How much would it take to clear up everything?"

Her face had flamed at the sight of his ready check book.

"Please, you mustn't!" she protested. "I—I can manage!"

"You mustn't keep me waiting too long. How soon, my dear, will you come to me?"

It was then he took her in his arms. She stirred uneasily.

"I—I don't know," she faltered.

"We'll say next month, then. I'll send Eunice out West, and Lottie to a school near her mother; but not until we're married. Wouldn't look just right. A man in my position must be careful. There, that's all settled—my beautiful, proud little girl!"

He had kissed her. She rubbed her clenched fingers fiercely across her lips at the memory of that kiss. No, she couldn't go to him now and ask him for money. She pushed the thought aside, driven by some instinct that she could not analyze. She merely knew she couldn't do it.

How could Lottie have done such a thing? Colleen felt smirched, degraded, by her stepsister's dishonesty. To-morrow she would ask Mr. Pettus to advance her the money on her next month's salary.

THE following morning she stood in the office of Bingham & Baird, trying to force herself to follow what Mr. Pettus was trying to tell her.

"Sorry, Miss Guerney! Later, whenever we are able to reopen, you must come around and see me. Here's a letter for you."

Bingham & Baird had failed—the firm whose service she had entered at sixteen as errand girl, where now, at nineteen, she held a secretaryship to the president. Failed! Slowly the fact took hold of her. She was out of work. What could Lottie do now? No new employer would advance her so much, even if she found a new position. She would have to go to Mr. Carew, after all.

Frantically she searched the want columns. It was December. All day she walked from place to place, one of a desolate line that eyed her hungrily as she waited her turn. Always it was the same. Sorry—nothing available now—perhaps later; and then the street again, to be jostled and bruised by the crowds of shoppers, hurrying with gay bundles from store to store.

"Why the gloom?"

She looked up dully. She had dropped into the Business Women's Club because she was too numb to

drive herself farther. Now Tate Farley perched on the arm of her chair. Tate was a débutante—nonchalant, friendly, who did Junior League committee work at the club. There had always been a certain wordless sympathy between these two, in spite of the social gulf between them. Now Colleen drew away.

"I—I'm all right," she declared, and stood up, her sensitive face quivering.

"And *how* you are!" Tate pulled her toward a corner table. "Here, Lulu, bring us some sandwiches and coffee, and make it snappy! Why, you're about sunk! Now, drink that! What's it all about?"

It was useless to resist. After the misery of the long day, Tate's quick sympathy was more than Colleen could bear.

"That's not so bad—to lose your job just when you're planning to get married!"

"But there's a debt I must pay first." It was hard to make Tate understand without exposing Lottie. "A hundred dollars—right away, and I—I hate to ask him—for it."

"Of all the bunk! Good night! If I ever fall in love you won't catch me stewing over a thing like money!" She stopped abruptly at the look in Colleen's eyes. "Tell you what—you come out to our shop and substitute for me for a month. The Christmas rush is enough to run me crazy. I'll lend you the hundred, and you can work it out. Will you?"

Would she? Colleen fought back the sob in her throat.

"Forget it! I'll meet you in the morning with the money, and take you out to the shop. 'By!"

Tate was gone, her absurd high heels tapping the tiled floor.

But it was not Tate Farley who met Colleen the next day. A gay little blonde swathed in fur seized her as she entered the club room.

"You're Colleen Guerney? Tate said I'd know you by your Peter Pan face. She told me to take you out to the shop. She's gone out of town unexpectedly. You know Tate! Says she'll be back to-morrow. Come on—my car's in the alley."

Suddenly she was in a cozy roadster, speeding toward the fashionable residential district.

Colleen herself lived in a distant suburb, formerly a mill village, which had been infolded in the outskirts of the growing city. There Mr. Carew's mill, his bank, and his stone house dominated the community. This was another world. She looked at the generous homes set far back on shrub-dotted lawns, the cars with liveried chauffeurs, the picture book children toddling beside trim nursemaids, the dignified dogs. Something deep within the girl seemed to stir and open, like a hidden bird trying its wings.

"Oh!" She stared as if bewitched, as the car drew up before a rustic mill lodged on the bank of a winding stream. "Is it—real?"

The other girl laughed.

"That's our shop. We keep the mill wheel going for atmosphere. Hot stuff! Come on—they're waiting for us!"

She pulled her companion across the narrow bridge, where a swinging sign bore the legend:

At the Sign of the Olde Mill—Junior League Shop

"Here's Colleen!" the little blonde announced.

The girls grouped within accepted the introduction casually. Colleen flushed, conscious of her cheap serge suit in contrast to the expensive tweeds of the

others. A slender brunette in riding togs seized upon her.

"Here, move those for me, will you?" She nodded to a shelf of pottery along the log wall. "Whoever lined up that orchid and brick dust side by side must have been color blind. Weird? Why, it's ghastly! Tell me when you're through. I'll be checking over these new shades."

To Colleen, who had always had to struggle for the bare necessities of life, these débutantes and care-free young married women, to whom the running of the shop had all the interest of a new toy, were a strange experience. She felt herself an alien, shut out of their gay chatter.

"Going to try out for the Little Theater?"

"Saw Bet Sinyard's new husband. Looks like Ronald Coleman, and then some."

"Not so bad, is it? Picked it up for seventy-five at Abe Hirsch's sale."

"Gosh, I'm tired! Give me a lift as far as the club?"

The laughing gossip wove about like a glittering web, intangible, yet impenetrable as a stone wall. In all her drab nineteen years Colleen had never known anything like it. Gradually she began to pretend that she really belonged—that she was a part of this gay new world. She found herself laughing with the girls, not knowing why.

"But who is she?"

Kneeling over a bin of wooden painted toys, Colleen heard Mrs. Nixon's whisper. Mrs. Nixon was the paid manager of the shop.

"We can't afford to let the bars down. Tate can't pick up any one she happens to find on the street and railroad her in here!"

"You know Tate."

A suppressed laugh drifted from the back of the shop. Colleen hurried out of earshot, her face burning. Well, after all, who was she? What right had she out here with these girls of wealth and leisure? She didn't belong.

"When is Miss Farley expected?"

Her voice was level, despite the rising lump in her throat, as the girl in riding clothes came toward her a few moments later. Her name, Colleen gathered, was Dale Harrison.

"To-morrow, probably. Here, try this on." Dale pulled an orchid smock over Colleen's simple white blouse and navy blue skirt. "Mrs. Nixon thinks these give a voguish touch which the shop needs." She grinned, lifting a humorous eyebrow toward the rear. "You're supposed to stay on while she has lunch, and then get yours. Sandwich place around on the circle."

She gave Colleen a little friendly thump as she went out.

"YOU'RE a stranger here?"

The others had left, and Colleen was alone with Mrs. Nixon for the first time. The older woman's eyes, behind her glasses, were hard, with the hardness of the socially insecure.

"In a way," Colleen said quietly. The years with Bingham & Baird had given her the poise that comes to any one who has learned to do any kind of work well.

"I see!" Mrs. Nixon's generous bosom seemed to deepen. "Rather a new experience for us! All the girls who work here do it voluntarily." She waited, irritated by the unconscious reserve in that slight figure kneeling over the wooden toys. "Well, I've got to go to the express office after lunch. If any one comes in, just go by the price tags. Some of the girls will be back before long, anyway."

Not a word about Colleen's lunch! Though she did not look up, she was aware of those thin lips and of the eloquent disapproval in that stout, arching back.

"I don't belong, and she knows it," she told herself.

A cloud seemed to darken the eerie beauty of the girl's face. When she was alone she sat back, like an elf, on her dainty heels, measuring her surroundings with moody eyes. The quaint charm of the place fell upon her—the spell of rough log walls and shadowy beams, of the stone fireplace, wide and moss-stained, of old brass gleaming in the log firelight, the luster of colored glass in all the rich tones of an autumn forest, and over it all the far rumble of the mill wheel.

Suddenly a clear call fell in golden drops of sound. Colleen darted to one corner, her small, brooding face flashing into laughter.

"Oh, you darling! You funny little darling!"

She stood, enraptured, before a cuckoo, teetering before his wooden castle. A vague noise made her turn. Her breath caught. There, standing over the cash register, by a table near the door, she saw a strange man. Later she noticed his coarse leather jacket and his stained boots; but at the moment she was only aware of his eyes, bold, laughing into hers.

"You—you wanted something?"

She came forward, trying to steady her pounding heart. There was more than a hundred dollars in that cash drawer, and she was utterly alone.

"How about a match?" inquired the stranger.

He studied her as she fumbled in the case.

"That's the ticket! My favorite brand!"

His familiar grin sent the color from the V neck of Colleen's smock to the black wings of hair across her ears.

"Is that all?" she asked, looking up into the gray, sardonic eyes.

Suddenly, quite unaccountably, she felt a wave of sympathy for this lean, uncouth figure, so oddly in contrast to the exquisite decorum of the shop, with his rough-hewn, scowling face and his upstanding yellow hair, ruffled by the wind.

"Thanks!" he said, pocketing the box of matches. "Business must be pretty good."

SHE saw his eyes light at the sight of the stacks of bills as she dropped his nickel in the cash drawer. She closed it hastily.

"Is there anything more?"

She watched him anxiously. She was thinking of Lottie; but there was something fine about this man. It would be too bad, if he were—like that!

"Would you look at that?" he said, glowering at his offending elbow. A smudge of black showed on the new blotting pad across the table top. "That darned truck! Some job I've got, knee deep in grease eight hours a day! It's a great life!"

His shrug indicated a giant steel truck outside. As he looked down at her the somewhat buccaneering air faded from his arrogant young face.

"I—I ought to be kicked, barging into a joint like yours," he apologized. "You'll be firing me out."

"No, I won't." And then Colleen said an unusual thing. "You see, I don't belong, either."

"Trying to kid me?"

"I work here. It's the way I make my living—as you do with your truck."

She was regarding him gravely.

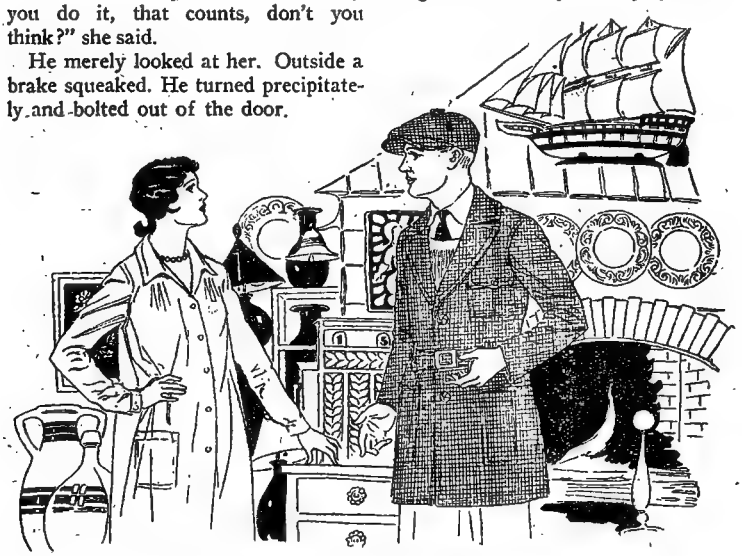
Suddenly the most important thing in the world was that he should get back into step with his particular universe, with which he was now so evidently at war.

"It isn't what you do, but the way you do it, that counts, don't you think?" she said.

He merely looked at her. Outside a brake squeaked. He turned precipitately and bolted out of the door.

Mr. Carew was waiting for her when she stepped from the street car that night, his eyes like narrow oysters behind his *pince-nez*.

"Why didn't you tell me about Bingham & Baird, you naughty child?"



"It isn't what you do, it's the way you do it that counts," she said, and felt the warm color flooding up her throat

"Who was that fellow?" Mrs. Nixon snapped as she entered.

"I—I don't know," replied Colleen, a little breathless. "He—he came in for matches."

"Not the type we usually attract!"

The blood surged to the girl's face, but she said nothing. She walked out for lunch, her chin lifted defiantly. Almost immediately she forgot Mrs. Nixon in the memory of a scowling, mutinous young face, gray eyes that stirred her strangely and an ironic yet lovable mouth.

he inquired, drawing her arm through his and rubbing her cold fingers between his dry palms. "We'll simply be married at once. Your mother's been telling me you've got a dress account that's worrying you. Here's the check. And was my little girl all-bothered over her little debts?"

She shrank away from the playful forefinger against her chin. She had an odd feeling that he was glad she had lost her job and needed to come to him for money. It gave him an excuse for hurrying the wedding.

"But I can't," she pleaded. "You see, I've taken another place and promised to stay a month. I—I can manage!"

He returned the check to a neat folder.

"All right; but I must insist on a definite date. There are certain proprieties a man in my position must consider. Let's say the 2nd of January. My secretary will communicate with the newspapers in due time. To-morrow I'll bring out samples for announcement cards."

His naïve regard for the position he had achieved through long years in the community always touched her, as if within the gray, precise business man she sensed the dormant small boy, afraid of public opinion, yet unconsciously egotistical.

At the top of the porch steps he stopped to kiss her. The dry intensity of the kiss startled her and left her hot with shame; but that was silly, silly. They were engaged, and of course he had the right.

That night she cried in her sleep.

THE next morning she stopped Dale Harrison as the little blonde entered the shop.

"Has Tate Farley come back, do you know?"

"Due back this afternoon. Heard about the sandwich shop? Some wild Indian cleaned them up last night. Walked in as cool as you please—not even masked. He was just a youngster—coal heaver type—about twenty-three—"

Colleen began dusting the pottery. Comments were tossed back and forth among the other girls.

"My brother says we're crazy, keeping money out here."

"When we need some one to tell us how to run our affairs it's about time we closed up. Who's going to bother us?"

"Just the same, there are lots of desperate men about."

It was noon. The girls milled out in a blur of chatter.

"You are to go to lunch first to-day," Mrs. Nixon announced.

"But I thought—"

Dale had definitely told Colleen that Mrs. Nixon would go first. She flushed at the hostility in the manager's face.

"If you please, Miss Guerney!"

Despite her suavity, the older woman's manner was as if to a servant.

Colleen pulled on her coat, her cheeks scarlet. So that was Mrs. Nixon's game! By little annoyances she was trying to make the girl's position intolerable!

She lifted her face to the driving rain, hurrying toward the sandwich shop. Well, she wouldn't let any one as mean and little as Mrs. Nixon hurt her!

"That's where he parked, huh?"

"Looks like a truck wheel!"

Two men lounged under an awning, pointing to the curbing in front. Colleen darted past into the tea room. Her heart thudded unevenly as a truck rumbled by, with a lean figure hunched over the wheel. It was no use letting her imagination run away with her; but her food stuck in her throat.

She walked quickly back to the shop, filled with vague misgivings. It was silly, she told herself angrily. As if she didn't have worries enough of her own!

Dale Harrison and Mrs. Nixon were talking when she entered. Dale turned, evidently ignoring a secret nudge.

"Of course it's all right to tell her. Mrs. Nixon thought she saw a man prowling around a few minutes ago.

Don't mention it to the girls. Mrs. Nixon, you'd better take the money to the bank, anyway."

Colleen took off her wet coat and buttoned her smock with shaking fingers. Of course he wouldn't have come back! It was just this time yesterday when he had walked in.

She sank to the fireside bench, with her chin on her hand, when Dale and Mrs. Nixon had left, the latter still protesting about something in a low whisper. It was not yet two o'clock, but the storm clouds had shrouded everything in premature twilight. The mill wheel rumbled uneasily. A gusty wind twisted about the corners, whipping raindrops down the stone chimney to sizzle on the embers.

SUDDENLY Colleen sat up, her every nerve taut. In the half light she saw a man standing over the cash register. She had not heard the door open.

"Who's that?"

"Hello! Didn't expect you here!"

It was the young man of yesterday. He grinned sheepishly as she came forward.

"I see!" She walked toward him. "Mrs. Nixon made me take lunch first to-day." Then, after a brief pause, she went on: "If you ever come in like that when she's here she'll call the police."

"Thanks for the tip!" The man's impudent grin faded. His eyes were suddenly grimly earnest. "Say, I've thought a lot about you—that line you handed out about doing your job right."

"Well?" said Colleen, as she slipped between him and the cash table.

"Suppose a fellow's already made a mess of things," he continued.

He jerked a handkerchief from his pocket to mop his face and bent swiftly to recover something that rolled to the floor; but she had seen. It was a tight roll of bills.

Colleen felt a sudden anger at him. She eyed him whitely, sharply aware of the hidden power in the lean, galvanic figure.

"Any man worth his salt can make his life what he wants it to be," she told him, watching the red surge under his bronzed skin. "Easy? I'll say it's not easy!" She had a curious longing to help him, to set him right. She leaned toward him, her delicate face brooding above her orchid smock. "You know, if you do your job right, it makes everything different. I imagine how a tree must feel when it drives its roots deep into something hard and strong."

She stopped abruptly, conscious of the strangeness of it all.

"I—I get you." He looked down at his sodden gloves. "You—you on here—all day?"

"Until four o'clock. Mrs. Nixon has the last hours." His question recalled her to reality. "Good-by." She spoke with conscious finality. "Good luck!"

He scowled down at her. Her eyes, lifting, were suddenly caught by his. Silence—a silence that shut them away from the rest of the world like a flaming wall. Then, suddenly, she was struggling against strong, compelling arms, and lips that held hers in a kiss like a stab.

"Don't! You mustn't!"

"I—I'm sorry," said the young man. "Wait—I've got to talk to you!"

But she had rushed to the back of the shop, sobbing like a hurt child. She heard him following. He stopped abruptly.

"Hang the luck!"

She heard the door shut. He had gone. She wiped her eyes hurriedly as Mrs. Nixon entered.

"Who was that fellow?"

"I—I don't know," faltered Colleen.

Mrs. Nixon walked to the cash register and bent to examine it.

"Well, it's not your fault he didn't take every cent we have! Very queer, the way he ducked past me, so I couldn't see his face!"

DURING the rest of the afternoon Colleen felt Mrs. Nixon watching her. The manager's conversation always stopped abruptly as soon as she came near; but she didn't care. She was thinking of a lean, scowling face, reckless gray eyes that sank deep into hers, and the fierce ecstasy of that kiss.

How could she? Shame shook her. She was going to marry Mr. Carew. All his kindness to her during the last three years rose to haunt her now; and she had let a common stranger kiss her—a man who might be a thief, for all she knew. She had let him fill her with disloyalty to Mr. Carew.

At any rate, she would never see him again. It wouldn't be easy; but she would play square if it killed her. A sense of aching desolation spread within her.

The last customer had left. As Colleen began pulling off her smock, Mrs. Nixon's voice halted her.

"I want you to stay on until six tonight, Miss Guerney. I'll be back in time to close up. Miss Farley called up from the station. She's coming by here. I'm sure I'll be glad to see her!"

"But I thought—"

The girl's expostulation died as the door shut behind Mrs. Nixon. She was too miserable to care.

Outside the rain had turned to sleet. Colleen took her coat, still wet from her walk at noon, spread it before the hearth, and sat down beside it. Deep in the log embers she seemed to see Mr. Carew, waiting for her, his breath hot and dry against her neck. She shivered.

She never knew how long she had been there when a muffled click jerked her upright. She peered over the back of the hearth bench. Beneath the slanting rays from the scattered table lamps she saw a man tiptoe toward the cash register, glance about furtively, and then, with one movement, open the drawer and empty its contents into the pocket of his leather jacket. This done, he turned and disappeared into the sleet-filled darkness.

Colleen felt curiously light and unreal. It was the same man who had kissed her.

"Well? Did he get away with it this time?" Mrs. Nixon suddenly appeared at the rear door and darted to the open drawer. "You think you're pretty smart, don't you?"

"Here, what's the row?" Dale Harrison walked in, followed by Tate Farley, who gave Colleen a swift hug.

"Look at that!" replied the manager. "She's done it, just as I told you she would!" Then, whirling on the girl: "Wasn't that the same fellow who's been hanging around every time you've been here alone?"

Colleen moistened dry lips.

"I—I don't know—who he was."

"She doesn't know!" Mrs. Nixon pointed dramatically to the empty cash drawer. She silenced Dale's protest. "I didn't take the money to the bank. I left it here to prove to you that I was right about her. She thought I'd gone, but I rushed back. If my car hadn't stalled I'd have caught him. I'd just

got to that window when I saw him run out by the front door. Why didn't she call for help, if she wasn't in with him?"

"That doesn't prove anything. How much did he get?" Dale snapped.

"One hundred and twenty dollars! Ask her why she didn't call out?"

Tate signaled the other two to leave her alone with Colleen.

"You know who did this. I can tell it from your face," she said quietly. "I know how badly you needed the money. I was a chump to go off and leave you up in the air. Come clean! Tell us the whole thing! I'll stand by you whatever happens, and so will Dale."

Colleen was silent. Then she spoke without looking up.

"I—I can't," she said.

Tate's purse snapped.

"Here's the hundred I promised you. I cashed my travelers' checks down town. We won't need you any longer."

"But, Tate, you mustn't think—"

Tate had turned away sharply. The telephone rang. Vaguely Colleen heard Dale's voice lifted in excitement, followed by Tate's.

"Probably nothing serious. Here, I'll go with you!"

The door slammed, and the two rushed away, evidently dismissing the matter of the shop's loss for some other and more urgent matter.

Now Mrs. Nixon was talking over the telephone.

"I shall have to ask you to remain here," she said a few moments later, as Colleen fumbled blindly with her coat fastening. "Here she is, Mr. Clegg!"

Colleen turned, to find the night watchman standing in the door.

"But I didn't take the money! You know I didn't! You can't—"

"Better come along with me, miss. You coming too, ma'am?"

Surely Tate and Dale hadn't meant to have her arrested. Colleen stared whitely into the whirling sleet as she drove to town beside Mrs. Nixon. Was that why they had run away? She felt cold.

"Haven't you some friend—maybe one of these girls you've been working with—that you could ask to go bail for you?"

The gray little man behind the desk spoke kindly, with his shrewd eyes on Colleen's pinched face.

"None of the girls know anything about her," Mrs. Nixon put in. "No question about it, sir—she's in with the gang that's staging these other robberies. Last night the tea room—tonight our shop! That's why I insisted on swearing out a warrant for her arrest."

"May I use your telephone?" Colleen lifted her head, ignoring Mrs. Nixon's existence. "Mr. Vergil Carew will take care of this for me."

But Mr. Carew was out. When at last she reached him his bleak, colorless voice frightened her. He would come at once, he said. Meanwhile Mrs. Nixon insisted that the prisoner should be searched.

"It just occurred to me, how do we know the man took it? Maybe she—"

COLLEEN followed the police matron from the room. She was too hurt, too numb, to care. What blind instinct had driven her to protect this strange truck driver? He was a thief—a thief! She knew it now; but to stand up in a court room and convict him by her testimony—she couldn't do it!

After all, they couldn't really do anything to her. There was only the

shame of the arrest. They couldn't prove that she had taken the money when she had never touched it.

"That? One of the girls loaned that to me," said Colleen, indicating the stack of bills that the matron held up before her.

The woman made no comment as she led the way back to the police court. She laid the money on the desk.

Colleen saw Mr. Carew come forward. He, too, had seen the money and heard the woman's comment.

"This is a very terrible affair," he said. He had a newspaper in his hand —an extra. He pointed to the headline:

JUNIOR LEAGUE SHOP ROBBED BY BANDIT

Girl Employee Suspected

Colleen's name followed in smaller type.

"I heard to-day about your sister, Lottie," Mr. Carew went on. "Miss Simpson returned before she was expected."

"But I have the money to cover it!"

Colleen made a futile movement toward the bills on the distant desk. She felt the ground crumbling beneath her feet.

"So that explains it!" Mr. Carew spoke in a dry, dusty voice. Then, to the man at the desk: "I—I'd like to settle this as quietly as possible."

"Related to her?"

A reporter spoke with professional curiosity from his place on the bench by the steam radiator.

"Not at all! Not at all! Merely a friend of the family. I prefer not to be mentioned in connection with the matter, if you please."

"Oh, you do! Well, I don't! Believe me, there's going to be a tall lot of mentioning before I'm through!"

A young man charged down the room, his rough leather jacket open at the throat and a white bandage askew across his forehead. Tate Farley and Dale Harrison were at his heels.

They had caught him! Instinctively Colleen started toward him. At least he must know that she had said nothing.

"You poor little kid!" Then, right before them all, he put a strong arm about her protectively, as he turned defiantly to the man in the desk. "I took that money. I—"

Colleen tried to stop him. His arm tightened about her as he went on.

"I've been after those girls for weeks," he said, "trying to get 'em to move that cash table to the back. It was just asking for trouble to have it there by the door; but no—that would destroy the artistic arrangement. Of all the piffle! They got sore, so I bet 'em they'd be sorry they hadn't taken my advice."

"You mean you deliberately robbed them?"

"I know it was the limit; but I knew there was a gang working that way. Besides, they had no business to leave this child out there with the bag to hold. When she told me she was going away at four o'clock I figured Mrs. Nixon would be there, so I pulled my stunt, just as I told 'em anybody could. Then, when I got back to my truck, some bully knocked me cold and pinched the stuff. Evidently he'd been trailing me. Next thing I knew I was in a hospital. When these girls told me—well, here I am! If you've got to arrest somebody, I'm your best bet!"

Suddenly every one began talking at once. Colleen felt Tate and Dale tugging at her, their eyes oddly wet. The young man shouldered them aside. She heard Mr. Carew from a distance.

"This matter seems to be amicably adjusted," he said. "Come, Colleen, my car is waiting," he ordered as his fingers closed possessively over her hand.

"Who's that?"

At the young man's question Colleen suddenly felt the bonds drop away from her spirit. She spoke quietly, her clear blue eyes on Mr. Carew's perturbed face.

"Merely a friend of the family," she said.

"And who is that fellow?" Mr. Carew inquired acridly, as Colleen and her escort disappeared together.

"That?" The reporter spoke up, grinning at Mrs. Nixon's departing back. "That's Jimmy Harrison, only son of old Ezra Harrison, the big steel man. Got a sister named Dale. He flunked out his senior year at college, so the old boy set him to running a truck. Going to make a man of him, the old chap said."

The man at the desk smiled dryly. He was thinking of a lean, scowling face, a grim young mouth, and level eyes.

"Mr. Harrison seems to have succeeded," he said slowly.

But Colleen, in the dim seclusion of the empty corridor, knew nothing of all this. She merely knew that two strong young arms held her close, that a voice, warm, compelling, yet touched with wonder, was against her ear.

"And you—you stuck by me! Look at me, sweetheart!"

Once more Colleen Guerney was about to be kissed!

Love Song

I USED to think I loved you,
Loved you true,
That all I'd ever ask of life
Would be you, you!

I used to think I loved you,
Long, long ago.
I used to only think I did,
But now I know!

—*Mary Carolyn Davies*

"I've got the greatest little idea! Rosalie, marry me!"

The Love Pretenders

Rosalie was in search of a new thrill. And Jerry? He had his own ideas

By Florens Artel Garrett

TO say that Rosalie Cummings was bored expressed it mildly. She was sitting up in bed, her lustrous brown hair caught in a dainty cap of lace, her knees propped up under silken coverlets to make firmer the little breakfast tray. One hand was holding a fragile cup of glorious coffee; the other lifted a slender triangle of toast, the color of sunset upon a mulatto's back.

But she didn't give a—a darn about life in general, or better still—life in particular! Her little world was all glitter, promises fulfilled. Never once had her heart beat faster nor her soul

turn topsy-turvy for the sake of a man! Not even for Jerry Mannering.

She feared she was supposed to marry Jerry; family tradition and all that sort of thing. Their families were constantly throwing them together. In fact, she wouldn't have put it past her mother or his to have planned it all in the hospital room those two inseparable friends had shared twenty years ago. And Jerry?

Well, the sunshine was pouring into the long window of his room too and casting a merry slant across the deep maroon quilt that spread over his lithe and fully awakened body. His bath was being drawn, and James, his bodyguard since baby days, was standing in the doorway telling him: Tennis at eleven with Rosalie. Luncheon at the country club with Rosalie. Tea-dansant at the Palace with Rosalie—

Damn! Rosalie, Rosalie, Rosalie! His family expected him to marry her. Planned it before he had got sick over his first cigar.

Then, quite suddenly, Jerry got an idea. Poor James was a bit off side after Jerry passed through that doorway and threw himself into the cool water. An idea! He whistled.

He'd marry Rosalie! Right off! Settle this nerve-racking servility to his family and hers. And then—two weeks later he'd divorce her! After that, the family couldn't very well say he hadn't married Rosalie.

Hurray! He sang some more. He even refused James's offer to shave him. No, be gorrah! He'd shave himself. He was a free man.

HE was standing in the hallway swinging his cane and smiling up into her eyes as she came down the wide staircase. "Hurry, Rosalie," he called impatiently, "I know how pretty you are; don't stop for last minute looks."

And before she was able to open her compact, or slip on her gloves, he had seized her hand and was running to the car.

"Jerry," she called p a n t i n g l y, "what on earth is the matter? Anything wrong?"

"No," he laughed, "everything's right! And just as soon as this blue-nosed bus of mine turns Clarendon Lane, she stops and out comes the best story of the month."

Rosalie laughed gayly, slipped off her light turban and let the swift motion of the car play with her hair. "Why can't you always be like this?"

"It isn't every day that a man decides something important and brilliant," he assured her.

"Oh," her little mouth wrinkled in saucy amusement, "I suppose you've really fallen in love with some one."

Here the car turned into Clarendon Lane, slowed down, stopped; Jerry's big moment had arrived. "No," he turned to Rosalie, took her hands in his and looked earnestly into her eyes. They had done this many, many times in light mockery of all that their parents expected of them; but to-day, in the bright, hard sunlight, Jerry's eyes shone like a young boy's; his face was cleared of all worry, all those queer little mixings of anxiety, wonderment, and impatience so natural to a man who is about to propose.

"I've got the greatest little idea," he squeezed her hands hard.

"Yes, and I'm exhausted! I simply can't wait another minute to hear it."

"I want you to marry me now—this afternoon! I want to take you away—and then I want—!"

But Rosalie leaned against the cushion of the car and gulped with

glee. "Don't—I can't bear it!" Then she grew a little afraid. Was he really serious? "You're joking."

"I am not," he protested, "I was never so serious in my whole life."

"But, Jerry, we'd planned, don't you remember, to put it off indefinitely."

"Listen here," he interrupted, "I've asked you to marry me. You've got to accept! And in two weeks from now I'm going to let you divorce me! Get the idea?"

"Marry you?" Rosalie perked her head to one side, and then to the other. "Divorce you? What kind of a racket is this?"

"The usual marriage racket," he supposed, "and by this ring shall all our mothers and fathers keep their tongues still—for after we've married each other and it doesn't take, Rosalie—don't you see they haven't a comeback! They ought to know we don't belong in the Stone Age."

"You really think it will work out that way?" Rosalie clasped her hands over her knees and tip-tilted her nose. "No more 'Jerry, Jerry, Jerry'! I wonder!"

"My dear girl," he nudged her playfully, "aren't those families of ours born to believe that once divorced the very idea of seeing each other again would be odious?"

"Jerry, you perfect darling! I see it all. Two weeks away, a terrible, terrible quarrel, perhaps a scandal—then divorce and freedom! Oh! You've given me a thrill, my dear, and I haven't had a thrill for ten years!"

"Then you agree, darling?" He took her hand to seal the bargain.

"Agree, you idiot! I'm unanimous!"

Nothing to do now but turn the blue-nosed bus around, drive up to the familiar entrance, drop Rosalie off; run around to the city hall, turn in at the club for golf sticks, park outside the house, bound up the steps, slip into the room and pack! Pack for freedom!

BUT Rosalie took time to select the nicest of all her things. She slipped in two or three negligees, a riding habit, swimming suit, tennis togs and beach pyjamas. Away to a honeymoon!

Strangely enough, during the ceremony at the town hall Jerry and Rosalie were quiet and serious. But once outside in the car, they faced each other and laughter again crept in between them. Rosalie looked down at her simple little circle of diamonds.

"Well, that's that," Jerry mumbled.

"Yes, that's that! And now what'll we do?"

"The appropriate thing is a honeymoon, darling, and it's got to be away from everybody—we don't want the family or any of our friends getting wise to this scheme of ours," he decided, "because if they discover us it 'll be just too bad!"

"They wouldn't understand, would they, Jerry, this marriage of ours—marriage in name only?" She looked straight ahead, and Jerry raised his hand to her face and turned her so that her eyes looked into his.

Passers-by might have thought it a very romantic scene—the city hall and all that—but Jerry was pretty serious when he said: "You've got my promise on that, Rosalie, I wouldn't have got you into this bargain, if we couldn't have made it that way. We're pals, you and I, taking the quickest way out. I'll not touch you. I'll not even kiss you—even though we've done that before—but we'll go through with these two weeks like a couple of pals—one for all—all for one. Agreed?"

"All those in favor say aye; aye, aye, Jerry!"

"Colombo!" he exclaimed, "that gives me an idea—we'll get out the old boat, putter around the bay, dive into those little islands when nighttime comes and spend our honeymoon on the high seas! What say?" Jerry was really enthusiastic. "No one will discover us then. We'll wire the folks we're off to Hawaii, and let them worry until we get back. Are you a good sailor?"

"Never was a better one made, Jerry, me boy," she responded. "Haven't we always done everything well together? Hasn't every one said we make a cute couple—that we'd make an adorable husband and wife? Well, then, how about a couple of raw-boned sailors? Your scheme's great!"

"Hooray! Got any old clothes in that bag of yours?"

"Jerry, you bum! I never had such a thing as old clothes. How could you! But—I've got a riding habit for storms, and I've got tennis shorts for the clean-up jobs like scrubbing the deck, and dusting off the anchor! I've got beach pyjamas for a stroll on the upper deck, what's more!"

It wasn't the big yacht that Jerry selected, because he didn't want to be bothered with a crew; so he decided upon the four-seater motor boat. After all, they were just going to putter around the islands and then hook up to some cove for the night. There were plenty of inns 'round Marin County.

THEY sent the wires to their families, threw their baggage on the seat behind them, and Jerry turned the nose of their little craft out to the bay.

"Jerry," Rosalie called, with the mist creeping into her hair, "aren't you terribly excited?"

"Not terribly. Why?"

"Oh, just this idea of doing something new!"

"But lord; we've done this hundreds of times."

"Yes, I know—but we've always turned back! Now it's going and going!"

"Yes, but we'll be turning back too, before long. If I really wanted to feel excited, Rosalie, I'd nose this little boat of mine out through the Golden Gate and have a look at the Farralones."

"Let's then! Nothing to do but obey that impulse."

"Nope, too dangerous." Jerry swerved the runabout behind a ferry boat and rode the waves.

"Why is it dangerous?" She looked down on the water and couldn't see anything about it to make it dangerous. "Smooth as glass when you get away from the big boats, Jerry."

"Well, it's rough, there's no bay out there, you know—it's ocean."

"Windward then, Jerry boy, windward! There's nothing so dangerous on the face of the earth as getting married!"

Rosalie, without the aid of her three-paneled mirror, would never know how adorable she was just then. The sun was setting across the Golden Gate. They were caught in its pathway, and her eyes were lit with its reflection. Her little mouth, a petal of red, was opened wide with laughter. Her hands fluttered excitedly; her body breathed the glorious damp salt air.

"Gee whiz! I'm not much on scenic effects, Jerry, but this takes my breath away. I don't believe I've ever been underneath a sunset just like this."

Jerry grinned, and one hand left the wheel purposely to bring her closer to him—when he remembered something he had said to her.

"We'll have plenty of scenic effects before we get back, Rosalie. A sunset a night for two weeks ought to last a lifetime. Next thing you know we'll be looking around for a golf course. Nothing like a green tee to gladden an old mariner's heart! We'll speed out to the Farralones, then turn about and head for San Rafael. There's a swell Ravioli joint in the town."

"Ou-ee!" Rosalie cried. "Food! Raviolies and hot coffee! There's nothing like a sea breeze to stir up the one bad habit we've got, is there?"

"You said it!" He grinned and then set his jaw suddenly. With a heavy pounding and thud of spray, they passed beyond the Golden Gate into the open sea. What a fool he was, thinking this boat of his, expensive enough, sturdy enough, and good-looking enough—all the things he had demanded when he bought it—should take them safely through rough water!

He didn't know the first thing about riding the swells. Should he swerve her, or hold her straight on the course? Should he nose her into the wave or ride her high! He wondered.

AND almost as suddenly as dawn breaks, the fog swept in upon them. It made them cold and a little nervous; although it was the last thing either of them would admit to the other.

Finally Jerry said, "Not much use in going as far as the Farralones now—couldn't see much. 'Spose we turn about?"

"Very good, sir." Rosalie's teeth were chattering, but she had sense enough to keep them apart. She sat on her hands. She tucked up her feet. She pulled her dress down as far as it would reach. And she pulled onto her head that closely fitting turban she had so carelessly flung into the back seat. She wiggled up her nose trying to smell that coffee in San Rafael! She thought how useful the family fireplace could be on a night like this.

But try as hard as she could, and Rosalie was no piker, she couldn't conjure up enough warm, dry thoughts to keep herself absolutely comfortable.

Nor could Jerry, for that matter. He thought himself all kinds of a fool. Anyway, he could turn the boat around and get into shore.

He turned all right, but he couldn't see very much ahead of him or behind. No penetrating light on a sport motor boat. A horn though. He tooted it. It sounded like a couple of sea gulls who saw the same fish at the same time. He tooted again.

And if he was expecting an answer, he got it! Two sharp blasts—almost upon them. Two thundering blasts! What the devil did that mean—to port or to starboard? He tooted frantically.

Rosalie realized the danger. She edged closer to Jerry; and then leaned away from him, leaned far out of the boat, and peered through the mists.

"I can see it, Jerry! It's coming right on us. Turn to your left, Jerry—hurry! It's a big thing-a-ma-jig. Quick!"

She sat back in the seat, clutched the wheel with her two hands and swerved the boat sharply. It caught with just the wrong twist and their craft flooded. The engine sputtered. The runabout tottered, slipped down into the level of the swell and lay there. Its motor died, and the boat began to toss.

"Can't make any headway now, Rosalie—no soup! Can you see any one on that boat—can they see us? It's our only chance."

"Well—I'm all in white," she tried

to sound gay and casual, "white helps in a fog, you know." She stood up in the seat while Jerry steadied her. "Toot your horn, Jerry."

"Can't—no motor."

"That's right—no motor. Yell, Jerry."

He punctuated his speech to her with another, "Hey there!"

"Afraid nothing! But of course I'd like to be discovered, Jerry. Hey there!"

"Boat ahoy!" It sounded like a thunderclap—that "Boat ahoy!"

"The freighter's stopped! Hold on as long as you can!"

"Hey there!" He cupped his hands to his mouth and Rosalie slipped down onto the seat. She hit her head on a fine decking of mahogany which separated them from the back, and it hurt—but that was all right. She knelt upon the wet cushions and yelled with him.

Jerry put his arm about her and drew her close to him. "Gee, I feel like a criminal, bringing you into this, Rosalie. You're cold, you're as drenched as a kitten and you're scared, aren't you?"

They strained their eardrums listening for that call again. They caught something like an echo of it. Then they heard bells tingling like a grandfather's clock.

"Rosalie! Did you hear that? They've seen us! Look!"

The bells seemed louder, and the thrashing of water against the sides of the huge freighter became clear and ominous to them. A tall shadow, almost like a pyramid, loomed in front of them. They were helpless.

The swishing of the water became a cataract to their ears. That shadow like the giant lid of a coffin! Rosalie screamed. Jerry yelled. The cut water at the bow of the boat spread a path of destruction. It clipped the side of Jerry's craft and tossed them into the water.

THE kapok cushions rode free and Jerry and Rosalie wiggled their drenched bodies across them.

"All right, Rosalie?" Jerry called, in a heartening tone.

"All right!"

"The freighter's stopped. Hold on as long as you can. It won't be long."

"You bet. But I'll take that back about being a raw-boned sailor, Jerry. I wouldn't care if I never saw water again." Gulp. "Damn! The darned sea won't stand still long enough for me to talk."

"Good old Rosalie!" Jerry muttered.

"What did you say?"

"I said good—"

"Hey—down there—can you see this?"

"What?" Jerry yelled.

"Life ring."

"Where?" Jerry scanned the black giant before him. He raised his head and could dimly see groups of men standing above him. High up! Lord, they looked as high as heaven. "I got it!" Jerry yelled, "pull her in."

"Got the kid?"

"The kid?" What the—Rosalie! She did look like a kid sure enough. "Hold her, Rosalie, I'm coming." He shouted to the men: "Give me some slack, will you?"

He caught Rosalie under his arm and tugged at the rope. Little by little they cleared the water—touched the sides of the boat—dangled in mid-air for a second and then were hoisted slowly upon the deck.

The skipper helped them to their feet, and blankets were thrown about their shoulders. Jerry and Rosalie stood before the group of men, wondering how to thank them. They felt like two little children who have been caught playing robbers on the front porch of a policeman's house.

Finally Jerry spoke. "Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Mannering, sir. Best thing on earth'd be a cup of coffee." He grinned genially into the other's stolid features.

The skipper spoke. Curt commands like the blasts of his ship. "Turn your bunk over to them, Mr. Johnson, and double up with Mr. Boyle. Can't turn back for you. Will signal a steamer coming this way. You can switch."

"Where you bound for?" Jerry asked.

"Honolulu."

"We'd like to go the rest of the way. As soon as my money dries out I'll pay you. You'll find you can afford it."

"How do I know that? And what you aimin' to go to Honolulu for?"

"Here's proof of the money—and I'll tell you the rest of the story when we're dry. Have a heart man, my wife's stone cold."

"BUT, Jerry," Rosalie whispered, as she sat on the edge of her bunk, her whole body wrapped and wrapped again in blankets, "why did you ask him to take us to Honolulu? Our clothes went down with the rest of the boat—it 'll take us days in this old thing."

"What could be better than this, Rosalie! Not a soul knows us. No one will bother us, and if it takes ten days to reach Honolulu so much

the better! A bully reason to divorce me! Brute of a husband forces wife onto freighter—demands that she tramp it to Honolulu for the sport of the thing. Your mother will despise me for subjecting you to such awful company. Not a woman on board. And the skipper looks like the Giant Killer must have looked to Jack. Tell her that, and my goose is cooked!"

Almost immediately there was a knock on the door. Jerry got up, opened it and nearly threw a kiss to the man.

"Here's your grub. Cook's sore as hell getting him to do extras, but it's the skipper's order."

After the coffee had had time to settle itself, and Rosalie and Jerry had taken the last bite from the tray, things looked brighter to them. Jerry got up, wrapped the blanket about his shoulders and started for the door.

"I'll go radio your mother as a sort of preliminary. Tell her we're off for a jaunt on the good ship Honeymoon. How's that?"

Rosalie laughed. "Grand, Jerry. She'll love it, I'm sure. See if there's such a thing as a deck of cards and I'll play you casino."

"You bet! I'll do what I can. Lie down for a bit and get some rest, you look tired."

"It's not that," she explained with a helpless gesture, "my compact's waterlogged, and the lip stick's gone down to the sea in skips! Maybe that adorable skipper has some extras."

"Maybe," Jerry countered, "but if he has, I'll not be the one to find out."

The second day found Jerry and Rosalie making a well-beaten track around the deck. The skipper turned out to be pleasant enough; entertained them in his room and told them some sea-going tales that neither of them had heard before. They'd heard of mutinies; of crews being made up of ex-convicts, fugitives—but they'd heard it only in the talkies!

To make matters worse, the skipper told them that the hold was piled with high explosives and percussion caps—for road building; that the crew was a nasty one to handle this trip, and he was short-handed besides! He had had to push out of San Francisco without three of his men. They were not to be afraid if they should hear him bellowing. Something you had to do on a freighter, by the lord!

They had their meals with him. Rosalie didn't get sick, although the food was almost unendurable. Even the skipper remarked this, and called the cook to headquarters.

Rosalie thought: "He just wants to show off! Kid us into believing some of these stories of his. As if we would!" She chuckled to herself, and winked at Jerry.

"If you can't do any better than that," thundered the skipper to the evil-looking Chinaman, "we'll jug you, see? More potatoes, more fresh bread. We've got company. Now git!"

The Chinaman shuffled closer to him. "Can't do velly well—sick here." He rubbed his hands across his stomach. "No cookee food too much—make more sick—here."

The skipper leaned back in his chair and laughed. Then he got up, strode over to the man, took him by the collar and shook him.

"None of that blarney—you get back there and cook, understand? No laying off the job till we anchor in Honolulu—and no funny business. We'll have food and plenty of it from now on."

Rosalie intervened. "He does look sick, skipper."

He glowered. "Sick! Why, say, they pull that stuff on every trip. They don't fool me any more."

"Give him a break," Jerry put in. "Lay him off a day."

"Yeah! I'll break his neck! You two young things keep out of this. We've got only one cook aboard and I'm going to keep him."

THE next morning the cook was "plenty sick." Jerry came back into the cabin when Rosalie called him. So far, they had managed beautifully. Jerry would slide over the edge of the upper bunk while Rosalie lay asleep below, dress and get outside. She would dress while Jerry made two rounds and back. Now he sat down on the edge of the bunk and related what he had heard.

"Sam, he plenty sick," he imitated the Chinaman with great feeling. "He rolling, he tossing about on his bunk like a poisoned cat. No food, no breakfast. Crew plenty sore. Captain plenty sore. We're to show our faces, P. D. Q."

"What do you suppose it means, Jerry?" Rosalie wiped her face with a towel, patted her hair in place and looked at him bewilderedly. "You don't suppose the skipper's really such a brute as he sounds, do you?"

"I don't know. We're due in Honolulu in three days. He'll probably find some one else to cook. Don't worry about it."

"I'm not. But men without food! He's told us anything might happen."

"Let's go on up and find out what's on his mind," he advised.

"Aye, aye, Jerry."

"The men want their breakfast," the skipper bellowed. He thundered, he waved his arms in the air. "You two are drafted into service—understand? You, now," he pointed a finger to Rosalie, "will do the cooking. You," he tossed the words to Jerry, "help her—bring in the stuff from the store room and get it ready for the mess man. That's all, the galley's midships." He turned his back on them.

Rosalie stammered, aghast. "But I—I can't cook, skipper. I've never cooked a thing in my life! How—how—"

The skipper wheeled about. "I never saw a woman in my life who couldn't cook! I'm master here. You'll have to do as I say. We're out on the seas, young woman, and a captain's word is law."

"That's out of the question, skipper, we're guests aboard." Jerry halted in mid-stride.

"It's either you do what you're told, or your life won't be worth a grimy penny! There's high explosives on this ship. We don't want mutiny, understand! Make something, girl, if it's only biscuits and coffee!"

"Only biscuits and coffee!" She almost yelled it at him. "I—"

Jerry caught her shoulders and whispered, "We've got to. He's right, Rosalie. If the men mutiny it means—well, they'll be picking up the pieces off-shore some place, that's all. It's only for this one time. We'll do what we can. Are you game?"

"But, Jerry," she looked bewildered, "I don't know the first thing about it, honestly."

"I don't either," he forced a laugh, "but two heads are better than one. Midships the command—and midships it's got to be."

"JERRY," Rosalie tied an apron about her waist and slipped on the cook's hat, "how do I look? First class?"

Rosalie caught a pan from the stove. The next instant she had hurled it at him

"You bet! Here's the coffee pot," he heaved onto the stove the thing that looked like a dozen coffee pots rolled into one. "And here," he hauled up a kettle as big as a cannibal's stew pot, "we'll heat the water first."

"Jerry," Rosalie screamed, "what's that thing for?"

"The coffee—and here's the stuff. Come on, we've got to hurry, the men are poking their noses in the doorway."

"Can't we give them something canned?" she asked, after the struggle with the coffee was over.

"Let's see—that's an idea!" He unlocked the store room and began: "Tuna, beans, soup, milk, butter—"

"Jerry, bring a can of soup."

He sat on his heels. "What—soup

for breakfast? They'll mutiny sure thing."

"Any crackers? Anything that looks like bread?" She trembled. "I simply can't make biscuits."

"Here's some crackers," he called back.

"Bring 'em in, Jerry. Crackers, eggs, butter, milk. Hooray! A he-man's breakfast for sure."

"One good thing," Jerry exclaimed, as he laid the stuff down on the table, "we don't have to milk a cow!"

"Let's go!" Rosalie filled the coffee pot again, since it had boiled over, broke the eggs with a splatter into the pan and then decided to scramble them. She wondered how you got eggs to look you in the eye with a shining face! An idea came to her.

"Jerry, bring the crackers here; we'll toast them and spread them with butter. They'll serve for bread. Oh!" she thought suddenly, "if I only had some cinnamon!"

"Cinnamon! I'll see—there ought to be some cinnamon in the locker. But what do you want cinnamon for?"

"For the crackers, you goose, it 'll look nice."

"Cinnamon for breakfast! Good Lord! Rosalie, you might just as well give them caviar!"

Finally, breakfast was ready; Rosalie asked Jerry to let the men know. She stood by proudly.

"Rosalie, you're a brick!"

"I'm apt to be most anything, after the men see their food—and taste it." She was nervous. A dark smudge from the bottom of a kettle had found itself across her cheek, her face was dripping perspiration. Her eyes were almost closed from the intense heat of the stove.

They got help—when it seemed they didn't need it; the mess man came in, took as much of the food as he could possibly carry and disappeared.

Rosalie almost cried. "Where do you suppose he's taking it?"

Jerry grinned. "Probably last rites for Sam."

"Jerry! You're mean! We must follow him. I've got to know what that food's up to."

They didn't have far to go—the men's mess room. They hadn't thought of that, nor known about it. The men came in grumbling. They ogled the new cook, and sat down grudgingly to a table of toasted crackers, scrambled eggs and coffee. But they didn't grumble long. For one thing, they were hungry. Anything in the way of food would have appeased them. But Rosalie and Jerry had piled their plates high with crackers and butter And sugar—a bowl of it!

The men thought the world had come to an end when Rosalie served an unheard of luxury: strawberry jam! But how was Rosalie to know that box of jam was consigned to the hotel at Honolulu—that it was kept in the locker for preservation!

And Jerry and Rosalie overdid themselves when it came to the skipper. He wasn't so pleased. Didn't they have any sense at all? Didn't they know when a thing was marked Royal Hotel—it meant Royal Hotel! He swore terribly. Rosalie put her fingers to her ears.

Jerry was indignant. "Say," he bellowed, "how do you get that way, swearing before my wife! I'll—"

The skipper glared. "You gotta get used to it. I'll get that mess man in here to help you with lunch and dinner. You need it."

"Lunch and dinner!" Jerry and Rosalie shouted simultaneously.

"Sure—cook died an hour ago." He

calmed down. "Give the men enough to keep their mouths plugged up. Give 'em anything. It's my own fault."

WHEN he had gone, Rosalie sat down on the high stool and tears spattered down upon her hands. "Sam died—sick here—" she was pathetically childish. "Oh, Jerry—I never realized life could be so awful!"

He came over to her, lifted the ends of her apron and wiped the tears from her eyes. "Rosalie, we've never had the time to look at the other side of things before. I'm damn sorry you had to see it. That divorce thing won't be such a joke after all. You'll probably never want to see me again once we land." He turned his face away.

"Jerry—" She pressed her hands to her lips. Something inside choked her. She was stumbling headlong onto a thing she never thought would happen to her. "Jerry—you've been splendid. You couldn't help what's happened. It was either be rescued or be drowned."

"Yes, I know that. But we could have caught a boat going home. That much of it is my fault."

"No, Jerry, we'd planned everything."

"Not like this. Not this hardship—this cruelty, this dirt! We thought it was a lark! God! I've grown up overnight!"

"We'll have to see it through now. Come on, Jerry—we've got to keep our bargain! There's the mess man to help us out. There's that much to be thankful for."

"We could radio the family—get some help somehow."

"Jerry!" Rosalie was suddenly stern. "That's the last thing on earth I'd do. We got ourselves into this. We're not cry-babies; although I did cry didn't I? But we'll see ourselves out of it, too!" She laughed. She got up and strode about like the skipper. "It's one for all—all for one, me boy. It's our little law of the seas!"

"Rosalie! You're an angel!"

But that night she lay awake for hours thinking of Jerry. Tired, worn out. Hauling those heavy sacks, doing that mess of dishes. Jerry who played polo superbly, who danced, who golfed, who had done possibly everything except—wash dishes! Game! She smiled proudly. She had never thought of him as being game in just that sense before.

Jerry wasn't asleep either. He lay there thinking of James, his erstwhile bodyguard, reeling off the things he was to do that day with Rosalie. But *this* Rosalie was new to him. A tear across her eyes, a smudge on her nose, a scratch on her arm, and a smile! Lord, that smile!

And together, they just managed the rest of the way in. The mess man proved useful as far as his job went; but Rosalie—he thought her very pretty, he teased her, he made love to her.

"Ditch that man of yours in the islands, kid, and stick to me. We'll get jobs on the best ships. See the world." He caught her in his arms, but she struggled free and glared at him.

Jerry came in, saw the flush on Rosalie's face and sensed something was wrong. "Stay out of the galley till you're called, steward. Your place is in the mess room."

"Who says so?" he sneered.

"That's my business," Jerry blustered.

"Is that so?" The man lurched forward angrily. "I'll fix him for you," he muttered to Rosalie, "and then you'll stick to me." He caught Jerry

under the chin with a blow that knocked him senseless to the floor. He jumped on his chest and pummeled Jerry's face.

ROSALIE shrank back stricken; but almost instantly the things within her reach felt good in her hands. She caught a pan from the stove and hurled it. Then she drew the meat cleaver from the table and stood before the startled man. "Get out of here, and get fast," she trembled with rage, "one more move and you'll be following Sam."

The man got to his feet. "Aw, kid. I just wanted to show you I loved you."

"Get out!"

And now—Jerry. He awoke to find himself in the bunk. His face covered with damp towels, his head in Rosalie's lap—her cool fingers traveling back and forth, back and forth, across his forehead.

"Rosalie," he called softly.

"Jerry, oh, Jerry!" Her body trembled against his, and he felt the tears upon his hands.

"What are you c r y i n g for, Rosalie?"

"N-nothing."

He moved. Startled by the pain he felt, he lay quiet. "Tell me, Rosalie, how much farther to go?"

"We're here, Jerry, got in an hour ago."

"Honolulu?"

"Yes."

"That's good. We'll cable the family, they can come for you."

"They're cabled already, Jerry," she said slowly.

"What did you say?"

"Do you really want to know?"

"Yes." But his heart was heavy. His spirit hurt almost as much as his head did.

"I told them about the boat wreck. I told them we'd buy some things here but to send our clothes. I told them to mark the trunks: Royal Hotel."

"Royal Hotel? You and I. You mean it?" He sat up with great effort.

"My dear Jerry, don't you know when a thing is marked Royal Hotel, it means Royal Hotel?" Her hand slid to his shoulder. "Jerry," she whispered tenderly, "I love you."

"Rosalie," he folded her fingers within his hand and pressed them reverently, "I worship you! I knew it days ago. Rosalie, my own adored little bride!"

And her husband kissed her—their first real kiss of love.

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A moment more and she plunged over the falls!

Northland Love

Hearts burn with fierce passions where nature herself is cruel. But the innocent love that united two courageous lovers defied evil—and won!

By Floria Howe Bruess

MARIE'S flashing green eyes burned dangerously as she stared at Ted Duke. Halfway down the big room he was bending over Grace Darrow, as the girl sat, flushed and dewy-eyed, gazing up at him.

Marie's hands clenched at her sides, her breath came hurrying through full scarlet lips. The man who stood beside her looked questioningly at her stormy face, then his eyes followed her intent gaze. He, too, became disturbed at what he saw; his lips came together in a thin line; his eyes took on a sinister look.

The musicians began a waltz. The two watchers saw Ted and Grace drift into the crowd on the floor, their bodies melting into one harmonious rhythm.

It was the spring barbecue time: the time Northern trappers came in from their long winter of isolation, bearing their precious pelts into the Post town. From every direction, the bells on their

dogs' harness jingling a merry tune, they came.

It was melody to the trappers, for it sang of the good times awaiting them.

First the business of trading their furs, then the big jovial barbecue, and when the moon of the new blossoms rose, the big dance. Then the short sweet Northern summer; idling at the Post; interrupted flirtations resumed; lovers, parted by the long winters and the lonely trails, reunited. It was what they lived for during the months the aurora flashed and the icy air froze the breath.

The huge room of the "trade house" was, for this night, converted into a dance hall. Gay flags and bunting hid the groaning shelves; barrels holding supplies had been rolled to the end of the room, covered with duffin, to make temporary seats for the crowd.

A man wearing moccasins, a gay fringed scarf encircling his waist, a brilliant hued handkerchief around his neck, danced by, a pretty French girl in his arms. Their dance was something Grace had never before seen—a poem of joyous, light-hearted abandon.

She laughed softly as she looked up at Ted.

"Isn't it wonderful? Look at that girl, third couple from us. Isn't she beautiful? And did you ever see such a combination of colors in a dress? Yet somehow they are as lovely as they are bizarre. There she is, looking at us. How her eyes flash! They almost burn one. Who is she, Ted?"

Ted looked swiftly at Marie. Felt a little shock as he met her flaming eyes. Why the dickens did she look at him that way? Did she expect him to dance every number with her?

"Her name is Marie du Bois," he answered. "I believe she was born here. English mother, French father. They run the place called 'Idle House.' A place where the unmarried trappers live when they are in."

What made Marie stare at him so furiously? He had never made love to her...they had been friendly, yes. So often she had come to the big trade store, lounged across the counter, talking, laughing with him. Sometimes she had been rather a nuisance when he was busy.

"She is beautiful. I have not seen her before," Grace said, her eyes kindling as they followed the half wild, wholly natural grace of Marie's figure.

"Is she?" Ted's eyes were on Grace's hair that lay close and burnished on her head; hair that glowed like a golden silken skullcap.

"Why, can't you see it? Where are your eyes, silly?" she asked laughingly.

"On the top of your head right now," he answered contentedly, the pressure of his arm tightening a little around the slim, supple waist.

The girl thrilled to that pressure. How sweet, how sweet the emotion that raced through her veins! With half closed eyes she relaxed a little in those strong young arms. Dreamily her thoughts floated.

Had there ever been any one like Ted before? So splendid looking, with his thick dark hair, his fine fearless eyes, his humorous mouth; tall, lean as a young Indian.

"Let's walk down to the river, will you, Grace? This dance is about ended. Let's go while they are still on the floor. I—I want to say something to you, but I can't in this crowd."

With shining eyes and quickened breath, Grace nodded. They danced to the door. Ted opened it quickly

with a swift backward glance. They stepped out on the long porch and the door clicked behind them.

But two pairs of eyes sharp with jealousy, smoldering with rage, had seen them leave the room.

"You stay here," Marie whispered sharply to Henry Janson. "I will follow them. I'll hear what he has to say to her. I'll see why he wants to have her alone!"

THE river lay gleaming under a moon that rode in the sky like a triumphant ship of palest silver. A night bird croaked hoarsely in the reeds; little waves rode in and out among the great dark shadows near the shore. Some came laughing to shore, tinkling against stones, singing as they sprang up the grassy edge, there to pause a moment in the shadows.

The air was laden with the odor of spruce and pine, damp, sweet as the breath of a garden after a shower.

"What a gorgeous night!" Grace exclaimed as they stood on the river shore.

"Just the night to tell you something—to ask you the biggest question the world ever heard," Ted said quickly, a boyish grin on his face. "I told that moon to shine, because I want to see my girl's eyes when she answers me."

"Did you tell the river to sing, too?" Grace interrupted, a little catch in her voice.

"No, but it saw you coming, so it started," Ted returned solemnly.

"You say the nicest things, Ted."

"That *was* rather neat, wasn't it? But look who inspires me!" Through sheer happiness they laughed together.

"Grace, do you know—what I want to say?"

"Haven't an idea, Ted," she countered, wishing to prolong that sweet moment. The moment that comes but once: when the only man tells you, for the first time, he loves you!

"Haven't an idea?" he echoed blankly. "Look here, Grace, why do you suppose I took that fifteen-mile dog-sled ride every Sunday to see you all winter when it was forty below? To admire the scenery around your cabin?"

She laughed softly.

"Grace—I'm in love with you," he said so solemnly that she dimpled. "I've been in love with you ever since we first met. But I was afraid to tell you. I know a beautiful girl must have scores of men after her. I'll bet you've had a hundred proposals. And you are different. Not one of our Northern wilderness girls, but a girl from a big city in the States. I—Grace, I love you!"

"Is that anything to be frightened about, Ted? You look so scared." Her eyes shone with wicked delight.

This dear, dear boy. Didn't he know she loved him with all her heart?

He was silent, and she went on dreamily: "How nice it was that dad got that position as head of the surveying crew for the new railway. Just think of it, some day a railway will run into Churchhill Post—"

"The Hudson Bay Railway. But why are you changing the subject, Grace?" he asked anxiously.

"Silly. I'm not. What I started to say was I'm so glad dad secured that position and brought mother and me out here to keep house for him the first year. And I'm so glad we got acquainted with the factor at the Post, because through him I met you. And—"

But no one knows what Grace in-

tended saying, for she found herself crushed against Ted's coat. And she felt Ted's kisses on her hair, her eyelids, her cheeks, and finally on the lips she gave to him.

"You love me, Grace?" he cried huskily. "My sweetheart, you are all mine?"

"Every little bit of me, Ted. All yours," she answered, eyes luminous as stars, face radiant, glowing.

A little later he said: "I'm not asking you to live out here, my darling. I've saved quite a neat bunch of money. I get a good salary as assistant to the Hudson Bay factor, and when you are ready to marry me, we'll go to your city, Minneapolis, and I'll get in the fur business. I know it from the ground up."

There was a rustle behind them as Marie, smoldering with repressed rage, turned and stole back to the trade house.

MARIE stood in the doorway, burning green eyes seeking out Henry Janson. Finally she saw him and signalled. He made his way through the crowd and joined her.

"You're in love with that girl from the outside, aren't you?" she asked curtly.

"Grace Darrow?"

"Yes."

"I am. What of it?"

"Then work fast if you expect to get her."

They moved aside as Grace and Ted entered the door. Immediately Henry turned to Grace. "You promised me this dance," he said, his powerful arm encircling her waist.

Grace found herself propelled down the room, held in that arm as in a vise. Off the extreme end of the room was the company office. Still dancing, he swept her on and through the open door.

Grace faced him, indignation in her eyes. "Why did you bring me in here?" she demanded coldly.

"To have an opportunity to tell you again that I'm crazy about you. Crazy in love with you. When are you going to marry me?" he rasped.

"Mr. Janson, I've told you before that I do not care in the least for you. I haven't the slightest idea of ever marrying you. In fact, to-night I became engaged to the man I love."

She looked at him with steady level eyes.

"That's it, is it? Now you listen to me, my girl. I want you and I won't take no. Any man who tries to take you away from me—"

Grace turned contemptuously, and walked swiftly from the room.

Near the door she encountered Ted.

"Ted, keep an eye on that man Janson. He thinks he's in love with me, and I'm afraid may try some underhanded work when he hears of our engagement. He's a terrible man. Somehow he makes my flesh creep when I look at him. I didn't promise him that dance. He swung me away before I could release myself. I'm afraid of him, Ted!"

MARIE and Henry walked slowly along the dirt road that led to the girl's home. Both were silent, these two who were so singularly alike in their unbridled passions. Both knew the same rage, the same fury of spurned love.

Finally Marie turned her blazing eyes on her companion. "If I were a man," she said savagely, "I would take what I want. Have you no backbone, no courage?"

If only she could force Henry's

hand, make him act, however ruthless the act might be...if Grace were out of the way...then she would be able to awaken Ted's love!

"What can I do?" Henry growled. "I can't abduct her, or, even if I could, she wouldn't marry me!"

"Make her marry you," Marie snapped.

"Easy said. How?"

The girl's eyes gleamed. "When she leaves to-morrow, follow her. Splinter her canoe when she is a few miles from the Post. The river is deserted now. Drag her into your boat and carry her to your cabin. Keep her there a day or two. No inquiry will be made, for her mother doesn't know exactly what day Grace intended to return."

"But how can I force her to marry me?" Henry interrupted, and the veins in his temples swelled.

Marie gave him a scornful look.

"There's one way that never fails with a girl like Grace Darrow. Honor to her is the dearest thing in life. She'll be glad to marry you after she's been in your cabin a day or two!"

Henry looked admiringly at Marie. "You devil!" he said.

"Going to try it?" she asked.

"Yes," he rasped.

"I WISH I could take you back in the motor boat, Grace," Ted said wistfully. "But it's the busy season now. Getting the pelts ready for shipment."

"I know, Ted dear. But it's an easy paddle back. I made it in three hours coming up, and I was against the current, too."

"But I hate to let you out of my sight, darling girl. How I'm going to miss you!"

"But, Ted," she protested, dimpling, "you will be over to our place Sunday, and that's only three days away."

"Three days," he repeated gloomily.

Grace laughed softly, happily. How dear was Ted's love! A love that rebelled at even so short a separation.

"Dad will probably be home. It seems funny to call that cabin of ours home, yet it has been for the past year. But as I started to say, dad will be home Sunday, and then you can ask him for his daughter's hand. Doesn't that sound funny?" she laughed gleefully.

"It sounds like music to me," Ted said with his boyish grin.

"Oh, darling, we're going to be so happy." Grace sighed contentedly. "Now one more kiss and I'm off. I've said good-by to everybody. Come early, Sunday."

"I'll be there for breakfast," Ted said earnestly.

A little later he brought her canoe from the boathouse in which they had said their good-by. Grace stepped into it, pushed from shore.

How lovely she looked in her white and red sport set. The red tam set jauntily on her small head, the white sweater enfolding her beautiful figure.

Ted watched her until she was lost to sight in the distance, then retraced his way to the big trade house.

FOUR miles down the river, his boat rocking idly near the shore, Henry awaited her. He had left at dawn, believing it better to precede than to follow the girl.

Little snatches of song came from Grace as she sent the canoe through the water with sure, strong strokes. Such a glorious day—a deep turquoise sky overhead; the water a stream of

molten gold; warm, soft, sweet-scented air...

Who was that? She gazed curiously at the wide flat dugout that was approaching her. Why, the man in it was Henry Janson! A little wave of apprehension seized the girl.

He brought his boat across her path. As she attempted to swing around him, he raised his pistol. "Get in my boat or I'll riddle your canoe with shots. You'll sink in about three minutes," he said harshly, wild eyes on her startled face.

But this girl was no weakling. She dipped her paddle with a powerful stroke. The boat shot ahead. Paddling swiftly, the distance between the boats widened. Then a shot cracked against the canoe. Grace glanced briefly at the small hole it made.

There was an offshoot of the river branching sharply to the right. Where did it go? Grace had never paddled on it. Could she escape by keeping close to the shore hidden in the overhanging timber?

With strength lent by fear, she dipped her paddle, strong swift strokes that swept her around the sharp bend. How dark from heavy shadows of overhanging trees, how narrow and swift a stream it was!

She heard the man behind her shout, but her panic was too great to heed what he called. With her teeth in her lip she bent over the paddle. How swiftly she was moving!

In the terror that filled her, Grace was oblivious of the changing water. Whitecaps frothed here and there, the water was swirling around the canoe so differently from the placidly rippling waters of the river.

A dull sound from ahead gradually reached the girl's numbed senses. The sound became a roar that grew in volume as the boat careened swiftly toward it.

Startled at last into attention, Grace looked down at the water. How it boiled and tumbled around her boat! She realized she was caught in a powerful current. A stone's throw ahead lay boiling rapids!

She shot a swift glance over her shoulder, saw Henry was not pursuing her. "He knew about these rapids. He's afraid to follow me," Grace cried exultantly. "I'm safe now. I'll paddle to shore—"

But even as she spoke it seemed a thousand unseen hands gave the canoe a mighty push. She was propelled forward; the boat gave a terrifying lurch, righted itself, swept on like a bullet shot from a gun.

Mist rose, wrapped around her as though she were in the heart of steam. The shore line became obliterated. The world for Grace became an inferno of mad, racing water, of clouds of mist and vapor.

Rocks reared their ugly heads, and the girl became wary, vigilant. She realized her very life depended on her coolness.

Ahead came a deafening roar, a thunder of falling water. Grace quivered, turned deadly white.

"Falls!" she whispered. "Oh, Ted, Ted, help me! I'm lost!" She closed agonized eyes for a second as a wild incoherent prayer swelled in her heart.

The canoe, flying at race horse speed now, reached the head of the falls, poised like a great bird at the crest, then shot over the sheer drop into the fury of boiling water and spray below.

HAD the canoe been heavily loaded she would have sunk like lead. Had Grace not lifted the paddle again from the keel of the boat and

worked like mad, it would have been splintered like matchwood against the huge projecting rocks. Her canoe experience dating from childhood, taught her coolness, poise.

Down the boiling spray-shot water, drenched to the skin, she shot. Gradually the narrow turbid stream quieted, and she came into calm water.

Trembling in every limb, breathing in short gasps, on the verge of collapse now that danger was over, she rested a moment.

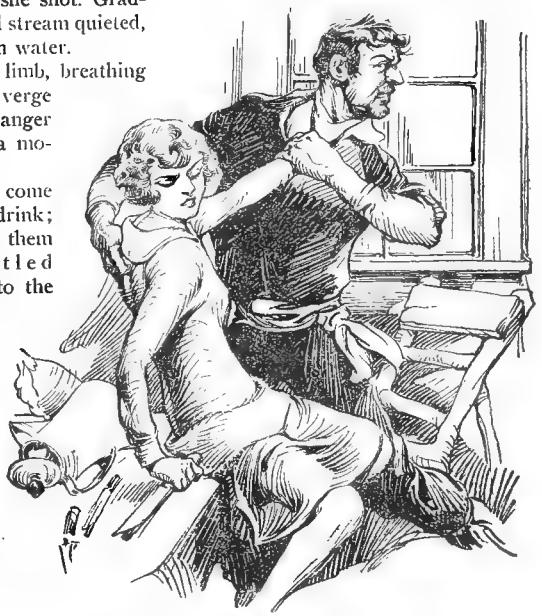
A herd of deer had come down to the water to drink; as her scent came to them they threw up startled heads and crashed into the woods. The sound roused the girl. She raised her head and stared at the shore. It was near. Only a little paddle. Wearily she picked up the paddle, swung the boat to shore.

A few moments later the keel grated on sand. Grace stepped into knee deep water and brought the boat to shore.

How dim and quiet, how far-away it seemed here. No sound save the distant thunder of the falls. She was safe. She had dropped over the falls and still lived. She lifted her face to the sky, a silent prayer in her heart.

And Henry! He would think she had gone to her death. That shout she had heard. It had been a cry of warning.

Where was she? What time was it? She glanced at her wrist watch. It was growing late. The spring days had not lengthened into the long days of summer, and it would be long after dark before she could reach the Post town. How horrible to be all alone in these dark still woods!



Grace's fingers closed about the knife

There were animals...the deer would not harm one, nor would the bear...wolves were not deadly in this mating season...but cougars! Would they harm one? Horrible creatures that lurked in trees—

Grace shuddered, and a little gasp came from her lips.

No use sitting here. She was rested now. She must set out. Perhaps she would pass some trapper's cabin. Her heart lightened.

Trappers were honest, friendly men. Men who would fight to protect a good girl.

Filled with hope, Grace set out, walking briskly. She would follow this stream until it met with the river again. Then she would leave the river shore —that horrible Henry might still be on the river—and cut through the woods, taking the shorter way to the Post!

Somewhere in the woods would be a cabin. Oh, surely, for she could not be over five miles from the Post.

The sun grew dimmer. It cast long crimson shadows through the trees. Somewhere in the distance a cougar screamed, high, wailing.

Swiftly darkness fell, and Grace stumbled forward on weary aching feet. Walking through woods was a different matter from walking on city streets.

"It seems the whole world is nothing but woods," she gasped. "Is there really such a thing as a city? Streets, lights, motor cars, throngs of people?

"Oh, Ted, if you knew where I was right now, wouldn't you be astonished? You are thinking I am home, probably eating dinner—no, supper they call it here. Ted, if you were only with me I wouldn't be frightened in these dark woods; I wouldn't be lonely! Ted, put your arms around me. Hold me close —oh, my darling!"

A sob fell strangely on the deep silence. A silence broken only by the river that seemed to sing now, very softly, as though on a muted string.

Overhead stars blazed forth, but the moon had not yet risen.

Wearily Grace stumbled on. Then—in the distance, through the trees, came a yellow winking eye of light!

Incredulously she stared at the light. "Oh, it is—candle light! It's a cabin!"

There was a rustle in the bushes near her and she sprang forward with a little scream. Running, falling, running again she came nearer, nearer to that winking eye of light.

Almost there now. With a gasp of relief she dashed up the two steps of the little porch. Without waiting to knock, for the rustle of those padded, furred feet were still in her ears, she flung open the door, crashed it to behind her, and stood leaning against it, breathing heavily.

The light at first was blinding to eyes just come from the darkness, but presently they focused and fell on a man sitting facing her.

With a face as white as her own Henry stared at her as though she were newly risen from her grave!

The strained nerves of the girl gave way. With a little scream she turned, fumbled blindly, wildly at the door latch, and fell heavily in a faint.

"WHAT'S the matter, Ted?" asked the kindly factor of the Hudson Bay Post. "You're not eating any dinner." He glanced at Ted's untouched plate.

"Mr. Andrews, do you believe in premonition? Somehow I feel anxious about Grace."

"Grace? But, my boy, why should you be anxious? She is a fine canoeist. All the ice has left the river. There is nothing at all to fear."

"Apparently," Ted interrupted. "She came down here without difficulty, and even if anything happened to her canoe she is a strong swimmer. Yet, somehow I feel that something is wrong... that she is in danger. Do you believe in hunches, Mr. Andrews?" Ted looked at his employer, eyes troubled.

The factor hesitated. Why add to Ted's anxiety by telling the boy of the

experience he had had years ago? A hunch that had proved itself all too true. The day he had lost his wife. She had gone down with her dogs and sled in an airhole in the river ice.

"But," he evaded, "Grace will soon be home now. It is five o'clock. She left about two o'clock. You are over-anxious. Love does that, my boy.

"How lovely she looked last night, and how she enjoyed the dance," he went on, hoping to divert Ted's uneasy mind. "She takes to our north country like a duck to water. It has been a fine experience for her. Her father was wise to bring her and her mother—"

He paused as Ted pushed back his chair and came to his feet. "I can't eat, Mr. Andrews. I tell you I'm worried. I'm going outside. I'll go to the trade store in about an hour. I want to—"

The door closed behind him, and factor Andrews sat silent, staring thoughtfully through the window. From the kitchen came a guttural singing as Osk-we, the Indian housekeeper, moved about the room.

Ted walked down the narrow dirt path that made a sidewalk. He was hailed with friendly greetings as he walked.

"*Bon jour*, M'sieu' Ted."

"Howdy, Ted?"

"Great dance last night. Say, what did you think of those silver fox pelts I trapped? Great luck, hey?"

His replies were mechanical as he walked restlessly.

Marie passed him. And as she passed she shot a peculiarly exultant, triumphant look at him. He walked on thoughtfully. Why the ill-concealed satisfaction? It seemed there was something vindictive in those green eyes of hers.

Acting on impulse he turned, overtook her. She glanced at him, a sidelong, startled glance, as he fell into step with her.

"Where are you going?" he asked, wishing to say something and at a loss to account for this impulsive action.

"Home," she answered. "I have been to see Nanette. She is sick."

Ted turned swiftly, saw again that vindictively triumphant look on the girl's face.

"Too bad," he replied mechanically. "By the way, where is Henry Janson? Haven't seen him around to-day."

"Perhaps he has returned to his cabin," she replied, and Ted's super-sensitive reactions thought he heard a quickly drawn breath.

"Why should he do that? He told me yesterday he was in the Post for a couple of weeks. And he didn't load up with provisions."

"Then he may be here. Why do you care?"

This time there was no mistaking the raised, sharpened voice. Or the sudden expansion of the pupils in those restless eyes. Her breath came with a little hiss.

Ted's eyes narrowed as he watched her.

She took a quick step forward. "Go your way and I'll go mine," she flung over her shoulder.

He stopped, watched her. Her steps quickened, as though fear dogged her. She was almost running when she came to her house.

Thoughtfully and with mounting anxiety Ted turned. "I'll find out if Henry is here," he muttered.

THE hours dragged their length. Each minute that passed seemed more fraught with sinister portent for Ted. His anxiety mounted

into a foreboding. Once during the evening he dropped a lynx pelt he was examining and stood silent.

"It seemed to me I heard Grace call my name!" he whispered, his lips suddenly white. "What on earth is the matter with me?" He hesitated a moment, then walked to the factor, who was making fur entries in a company book.

"Mr. Andrews," he said unsteadily, "I can't stand it. I'm so anxious about Grace. I must take a motor boat and go to her home. I have to assure myself she is all right."

Factor Andrews looked up swiftly. "Why, she is home hours ago, my boy," he said. "But, to relieve your mind, take one of the boats and run down," he added kindly.

"Thanks. I'll come right back." Ted dashed to the door. As he ran to the company boathouse Marie came swinging down the dirt street. She too was restless, for she knew Ted had searched, and fruitlessly, for Henry.

And why did he search? How could he possibly have any suspicion? Her plan must not fail now. This girl who had come between her and the man she loved with all her untamed, mad, and ruthless heart must be humiliated, humbled, so that she would gladly marry Henry.

Then the way would be clear for her, Marie. Ted had been attracted to her before this girl came; a little more time and he would have loved her.

There was Ted now. What was he doing? He should be in the trade house, for now was the busy season. He was going to the boathouse.

The boathouse! Marie's heart stood still. Why? Why?

She ran to the log building. Ted was inside examining the motor in the boat.

As she ran up to him he stepped into the boat. She heard the preliminary *putt-putt* of the motor.

"Ted, where are you going?"

He swung around to stare into her frightened face.

"You act as though I've never been on the river before!" he snapped.

"Where are you going?" Her voice became shrill and he saw the swift pallor that spread over her face.

For answer, the next moment the boat had glided out, headed in the direction where lay Grace's temporary home.

Marie listened to the *putt-putt* as the motor gained speed, and she thought of Henry's cabin, that also lay in that direction.

GRACE, fighting her way back from the darkness that engulfed her, struggled weakly as she felt herself being lifted. A moment later she opened her eyes dazedly. Full recollection came when she looked up at the man standing before her.

With horror-filled eyes she shrank back in the chair as she measured the distance to the door. But Henry's figure barred the way. There was a window, but it was closed, for the night was cool.

She attempted to speak, but the words would not come. Her throat seemed held as in a vise.

"Of all the luck!" Henry exclaimed. "You got safely out of the falls, was cutting through the woods back to the Post, saw my light, and thought you'd find a nice motherly trapper's wife, or an Indian squaw here!

"Sure and my luck is good to me to-night. It saved you for me and brought you right to my door," he exulted.

At last Grace found her voice. "If

I had known...I had no idea your cabin was around here...I thought you lived up near the Bay—" Her voice choked.

"I do in winter. But I keep this cabin—only one room, you see—for summer. But one room is plenty big for us two, my pretty." He stood over her gloatingly, and Grace's soul sickened.

Her eyes closed as she prayed wildly, incoherently. "Lord, you helped me before, but this is worse than death in the falls...why didn't You let me die then...help me now...You must—"

"We'll be married to-morrow, and after we're married I'll be good to you, for I'm crazy about you. And this is the country for you. A girl with your nerve. To get over the falls alive! No one's done that except the Indians. I thought you were gone sure. You're the wife for a prospector. You'll bring me luck, and I'm mad with love for you, my girl."

Grace's eyes had been searching the small untidy room. Suddenly her head fell forward. "Water," she gasped chokingly. "Get me some water—"

Henry turned, walked across to the tin pail that stood on an empty box. He dipped a tin cup—then wheeled as he heard a sound behind him.

With a swiftness born of desperation Grace had risen and sprung to the door. She was almost through when Henry's great arm flung her back. As she fell against the crude log-built table her hand went out involuntarily. She looked down as it struck something hard, something with the chill of steel. Her fingers closed swiftly, gratefully on the handle of a long, razor-edged skinning knife.

Henry recoiled, his face gray as she held the point of the blade to her breast.

"Stand aside," she commanded, voice suddenly cold and deadly.

"Stand away from that door, Henry Janson. Don't make a move toward me, for if you do I tell you I shall use this knife!"

Savagely he rasped at her, "Go then!" But she would not get far away, he told himself. Spread this tale at the Post as soon as she reached there? The men would kill him.

Watching him warily, Grace edged to the door. She backed out, crossed the threshold and fled toward the river.

She would keep on the river trail, for it was lighter there. Soon the moon would flood the water and woods with its fairy light.

Slowing a moment to skirt a gully, she heard heavy steps behind her. Almost she heard Henry's panting breath. He was following her! She checked the strangled sob that rose to her lips.

Grace flew over the ground. Ah, there was the river at last! Without pausing to look around, for she heard the cracking of twigs as a heavy foot pressed on them, she placed the handle of the knife between her teeth and ran out into the water.

It was deep near shore, and almost immediately she became immersed to her armpits.

In the distance came the *putt-putt* of a motor boat. Grace and Henry heard it simultaneously. With a curse the man stopped, gazed up the river that was slowly becoming a great sheet of rippling silver as the moon climbed higher.

Henry hesitated. What to do! The girl would shout to attract the attention of the occupant of the boat. Would she be heard? The boat was coming toward them, for the clack of the motor grew louder.

Henry swam back to shore, stood

waiting in a deep shadow cast by the trees.

HE heard Grace's voice raised in a shout. But the call was not far-reaching. She had undergone such extremes of peril, fear and fatigue, her strength was nearly exhausted.

She swam desperately, feeling her strokes weakening; feeling the pound of blood in her temples. The boat was nearer...how eerie was the sound on that silent brooding river.

"Help, help!" she shouted as loud as she could. But Ted's ears heard the call. And Ted's eyes, sharpened by love, detected a head that moved toward him down the silvery path on the water.

He cut off the motor and went with the current. Cautiously he drew near that head.

"I'm coming. Reach up and grasp my hands when I lean over," he called.

The familiar voice sent such a shock of overpowering joy through Grace that she turned dizzy, faint.

"Oh, Ted, Ted!" she cried.

"My God, it *is* Grace!" Ted whispered unbelievingly. His hands outstretched, he drew the dripping little body tenderly over the gunwale.

Wordless for the moment, he held her in his arms against his heart. In a wild passion of sobs Grace clung to him, trembling, teeth chattering.

Presently he put her into one of the two seats, took a blanket from a box and wrapped it around her. His hands were shaking and he tasted the bitter brine of tears on his lips.

Incoherently Grace told him about the terrible day. Told him, arms clinging, lips against his cheek.

Occasionally she raised her trembling hand, felt his cheek. "Oh, Ted, are you really here? I can't realize it...so wonderful...my darling... my Ted."

There was a terrible look on his young face as he soothed her with tender words; there was a grim look in his eyes. It seemed Ted had aged. All boyhood had fled, leaving a man, grim, intent on retribution.

"He shall pay, my poor little sweetheart. If I don't kill him, I'll drive him from the North!"

"Drive him away, but don't have murder on your hands, Ted. Make him suffer, but don't kill him. He deserves it, but for our own sakes, don't commit murder!

"Oh, Ted, how did you happen to be on the river? Oh, I can't believe it's true. Am I safe? Am I here with you?"

"You are safe, my darling. I came because I knew you needed me. I heard you call my name. I felt you were in danger."

They clung together. Inarticulate little words, words that each understood perfectly. Kisses mingled with the tears on their lips.

At last, "I must start the motor and take you home, sweetheart. And Grace, I can't bear to have you away from me now. I came so near losing you. Will you marry me to-morrow? Please, darling. Give me the right to take care of you."

"Yes, Ted," she answered unsteadily. "I, too, never want to be away from you again. I belong to you."

"And within a month we'll go to the States and you'll be happy," he cried joyously.

"I'll be happy any place...with you, Ted," she said with quivering lips.

Their great love had come into its own.

Planets of Destiny

Professor GUSTAVE MEYER, Conductor

BY the application of the scientific principles of astrology your questions will be answered in these pages. But the publishers of this magazine, and also the conductor of this department, do not hold themselves responsible for the accuracy of the replies, inasmuch as many readers furnish incorrect birth data and others do not know the hour of their birth. This department is conducted only for such help or interest as readers may obtain from it.

One question is allowed each reader—if an answer by mail is requested, inclose ten cents in stamps or money order to cover cost of mailing. Question must be accompanied by coupon to be found at the end of this department. Please do not ask questions concerning death, speculation or the whereabouts of lost property.

It is very important that you give the following data: time of birth (hour of the day or night), date, month, year and place. Also sex.

DAILY ASTROLOGICAL GUIDE
FOR THE SECOND HALF OF MAY

16th—Don't go shopping in the morning. And if you do go shopping, don't buy real estate or mining stocks. This would not be a good time for dealings with people older than yourself.
In the afternoon, don't sign anything of any importance and be generally cautious.

17th—In the morning, impulsiveness should be curbed. A rather hectic morning with a slight danger of minor accidents.
The afternoon would be good for seeking favors, either from literary, professional or scientific people. If you have letters to write, choose this time.

18th—The morning pretty much the same as the previous afternoon, except that those engaged in spiritual matters would find these hours auspicious. Journeys might well be begun in the afternoon.

19th—If you contemplate making any radical changes, this would be a good time. Propitious also for those occupied with the occult. If favors are to be sought, or raises in salary asked for, the afternoon is good.

20th—A rather inflammable morning. Guard against accidents. Also be more diplomatic than usual in domestic crises.
Land or real estate dealings not good. Any temptation to be morally indiscreet should be guarded against during the afternoon. Threatening for accidents on or in water.

21st—An unsafe morning, needing diplomacy in all aspects, followed by an afternoon when changes might be instituted.

22nd—In the morning guard against extravagance and make no deals of any importance.

In the afternoon, move more freely, seek favors if you must.

23rd—In the morning, avoid purchasing things for the domestic side of life. Otherwise the day is good generally for business.

24th—In the morning, caution is needed. Do not have important dealings with elderly people.
The afternoon would be a good time for purchasing wearing apparel.

25th—Apt to bring forth heavy financial reverses and accidents, such as burns, cuts, scalds and bruises.
The afternoon is good for seeking pleasure and for dealing with the opposite sex. Domestic affairs also should go smoothly.

26th—Exactly the opposite advice from that of the previous afternoon—avoid important dealings with the opposite sex. Do not spend too much money shopping, as your purchases would be apt to be unsatisfactory. The afternoon is better. Any real estate matters might be adjusted and contemplated changes put into execution.

27th—In the afternoon, avoid religious arguments. And although this time is good for seeking and finding pleasure, any action that might result in scandal is to be guarded against. Good for purchasing clothing.

28th—The morning is still good for dealings with the opposite sex. The afternoon not good for routine matters, but auspicious for spiritual contemplation, research along occult lines, etc.

29th—The morning is good for traveling. Also correspondence. Good also for financial dealings. If you have interests involving iron or metals, automobiles, etc., this would be a good time to adjust them.

30th—Good for shopping, especially for household goods. Research for pleasure should go smoothly until afternoon, when domestic troubles might be guarded against. Do not sign or write anything during the afternoon.

31st—Morning auspicious for corresponding or planning journeys, but in the afternoon have nothing to do with people engaged in pursuits involving firearms, combustibles, metals or iron. Accidents either with fire or in traveling by water are indicated.

"When will I have the home of my dreams?" asks Miss S. E. M., born June 17, 1906, at 8 A.M. You seem quite sure that you will own that dream home eventually, and I am glad to assure you that your stars look favorable. The best period in your life thus far, Miss S., is indicated for the spring of 1931 on; and you should have opportunities for house-furnishing either in your twenty-seventh or twenty-ninth year. Your sun was in Gemini and Leo was rising at your birth. If you fall in love with a man whose nature is that of a leader, your task will be to keep yourself from usurping the center of the stage too often, as you are very prone to do.

Something leads Miss E. E. L., born July 15, 1903, at 4 A.M., to anticipate a radical change in her life this year. She doesn't let us in on the details, but her planetary configurations do not bear out her "hunch." Looks as though there wasn't any change due you until the spring of next year, Miss L. But when it does come it should be for the better. You could help it along by trying to overcome your inclination to retire too much within yourself. Your friends and relatives may adjudge you cold and unfeeling, but the truth is that you express your emotions in action, not words. Do not allow yourself to be alone long enough to become melancholy, and forget your self-consciousness.

Miss A. F., born May 19, 1902, is too backward in going forward. She asks where will she be two years from now? My answer is if she succeeds in not falling back, she will be just where she is now—if she is lucky! You've got a combination of Virgo and Taurus, Miss A. F. Why not do a little deliberate resolving?

Next summer ought to help gladden the heart of Mr. F. C., born September 19, 1886, whose past, he claims, has not been all it should! Cheer up, Mr. F. C., good and bad times for all. Yours will come.

Born March 8, 1883, between twelve and one o'clock, Mrs. J. D. W. is pessimistic about her future as judged by her past. Neptune and the Moon, ruling your destiny, tend to make you extremely changeable and timid, also self-conscious. But that's not necessarily fatal. You will find yourself in a happier frame of mind by next spring, Mrs. W.

With Scorpio and Capricorn as birth signs, Miss A. V., born October 25, 1913, around noon, your natural tendency to brood, worry and overexaggerate just must be taken into account before it is too late. You say you are recovering from one nervous breakdown. Now that you know you must avoid too much introspective brooding, make up your mind to have a go at life from a more healthy

standpoint. You have plenty of force, given by Mars, and although Saturn, which rules Capricorn, usually tends to bring success later on in life, the summer of this year will be better for you than the past few years have been. Remember to be optimistic if you would get anywhere.

Mrs. J. M. M., born March 17, 1902. How can I tell you about your sister's affairs when you do not give me her birth data?

No, Mrs. A. E. R., born July 4, 1868, there's no answer to your question. If you will read the rules at the head of this department, you will see why. We cannot undertake to answer questions about the termination of life.

That applies also to Mr. E. T., born March 6, 1882; Miss L. T., born October 31, 1869, and to "Sunshine." The natal chart of Mr. T. would seem to promise him a ripe old age unless he worries himself to death! He is too given to borrowing trouble and to crying before he is hurt. His undertakings throughout life have begun in darkness, but ended in more light and hope than he expected. Guard against stomach, liver and bronchial troubles and rheumatism, Mr. T.

A turbulent uphill struggle has nevertheless netted Miss L. T. an eventful and romantic life. Always had to fight for your rights, haven't you, and work hard for anything that came to you? That has helped to make you too modest and timid, so that you make few friends—but those, good ones. You should possess a charming personality.

"Sunshine," you also have had more clouds than sunshine in your life and the bearing of many responsibilities. You have a deep religious and spiritual nature; why not find your fortification in your faith? It is possible for the stars to warn you of the times when your husband's health would be in gravest danger, but why add to your own burden? Won't you take my word for it that the attitude shown in your letter is the best one, and that your stars do not promise you unhappiness always? Write me again later on if I can be of any help.

Two sisters come forward to ascertain the possibility of marrying their present sweethearts. You're getting anxious too soon, girls! If I had been born in 1914, like H. B., or in 1913, like F. B., I'd be whooping for joy that I had such a nice long time of freedom before me in which to learn, by falling in and out of love, which man I really could spend my life with. As the elder, F. B., I'll give you your prospects first. It looks as though this young man your fancy has picked on might be a happy choice, but don't marry him yet! I can't tell you very much, you know, without the young man's birth data to compare with yours—why not send it in to me if things become serious? All I can say at present is that there should be a time not so long from now when marriage might be undertaken with hopes of happiness. Remember, however, that your tendency to judge and condemn others and speak ill of them will not make life happier for yourself. You are inherently just, but control yourself.

Your sister has not found an ideal mate in her present choice. Give him up, H. B. You won't lack opportunities. Your seventeenth, nineteenth, twenty-first and twenty-third years should be productive of romance, and you may marry at any of these times. According to your chart, you might perhaps find the most happiness with a man a trifle older than yourself. You crave a spiritual and emotional mating, and I should say that you would have more of romance in your life than the average woman has. You are dreamy and visionary, and possess dignity and grace.

Your question is too indefinite, A. C. A. (Read the rules about individual replies by mail.) "What has the future in store for me?" If you have any real perplexity write me again. I can tell you this, though—with your natal chart you are apt to come out of troubles which others would not.

Same to you, Mr. L. H. G., born July 24, 1910. You asked two questions, too. It seems that aspects which have been troubling you slightly should begin to improve from late summer of this year. You possess a combination of Aries and Taurus rising, with your Sun in Leo, giving you the ability to succeed if any one can. You need to be cautioned about being too much the dictatorial ruler and too little, perhaps, the beloved leader. The chance to wield power should come your way.

Mrs. E. T., born September 3, 1871, you will never find absolute perfection, for it doesn't exist in this world of ours. You should know that, for you are a good judge of human nature, yet you will always seek it, won't you? Practice what you preach and don't have too many irons in the fire at once. About your question, there would seem to be some trouble or slight loss in prospect before the money comes in sight, but I think the eventual answer is Yes.

Yes to you, also, E. J. D., born November 26, 1901. Is your business something pertaining to the needs of women? You do not give

the time of birth exactly. If you sell it, it should be the autumn or winter of this year. You would succeed better in your ventures if you would control a too frank and outspoken tongue. Candidness is good, but consideration is better. You love traveling and may see a good deal of it.

Better keep out of court, Miss F. S. I see a better break for you if the case you speak of is adjusted between the parties concerned. Born March 30, 1899, your first impressions are the best and your intuition, which is keen, should stand you in good stead through life. You care more for business and a career than for the kitchen, don't you?

Can't promise you a very good break until the coming winter, Mr. H. L. K., born February 21, 1888. Did your wife find you too much of a rolling stone? You might fight life better by choosing one line of endeavor or one locality and sticking to it. You have very good points, but you don't give yourself a chance by trying too many things at once.

Your ailment should get better with time, Mrs. T. R., born January 25, 1874. Heart or blood trouble, is it? You have also had trouble with either kidney or liver, if I am not mistaken. You have a leaning toward the occult sciences and philosophy.

Born April 2, 1903, Miss N. DeS. has the nature of an artist. That she already feels the pull is evidenced by her query. I can say this much to her: if all that was required to make a successful actress was the temperament and the inclination, she would be famous! Many an undeveloped star is now tackling a business career or even minding the baby, Miss N. Depends upon your circumstances. If these are satisfactory financially, you might do worse than to try your luck.

Astrology takes heed only of the forces of nature, Miss E. C., born December 12, 1892. Divorce is a man-made law. I might tell you of the time when you and your husband will have separated emotionally and intellectually, but when your divorce will be granted—if ever—is not the affair of the stars. I can advise you that prospects for your happiness look brighter with the late summer or early autumn of this year—do you think a divorce necessary to your happiness? You have high ideals, and are quite upright and just in your judgments. But if anything you are too outspoken and frank and this mitigates against your own happiness as well as that of others.

1931 or 1933, Miss B. R. C., born July 9, 1908. At least you should feel the promptings at either or both of these times and if you should make up your mind to marry you might do so with a clear conscience—as far as the stars are concerned! Auspicious times to begin matrimony. Looks as though the intended, if you marry at either of these times, should be in fairly good circumstances. You gravitate toward the dignified type of man.

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Mr. Fraser bases his judgments on the scientific rules of graphology. In no case does he forecast the future or attempt to reveal the past. Scientific graphology undertakes only to reveal the inner secrets of your nature.

As many answers will be given on these pages as space permits. All other questions will be answered by mail. A stamped, addressed envelope must accompany your request for analysis.

AMONG the many letters I have received during the past week from readers, none gave me more joy than a communication from a young friend in Oklahoma. Anne is now a three months' bride. It appears that even up to a month before the day scheduled for her wedding she was hesitant and doubtful about her sweetheart's real disposition, and his ability to measure up as a husband.

"All those doubts, however, disappeared," she writes, "when I read your straightforward analyses of both our characters. You put my mind at rest about our future happiness. Our wedding is a thing of the past," she continues, "and I thought you would like to know that 'my man' is all that you said he would be, in disposition and temperament. In three months' time a wife can get a pretty good line on her husband, and your deductions about Al were nothing short of uncanny. He is just as you said he would be."

Thanks, Anne, for your kind letter of appreciation, and as the Scotch say, "lang may your lum reek."

And if you don't know what that means, write and ask me!

SERVICE FOR SWEETHEARTS

nasty however, for I am sure
Lillian
it was quite a success & I nearly won a prize.
Edward

(Miss Lillian K., Halifax, N. S.) Your letter interested me to the extent that I went into the analysis of Edward's handwriting much more minutely than I would otherwise have done. When he is "so finicky," as you say he is, why do you bother with him? The very fact that you do, convinces me that you love the boy in spite of what you say to the contrary. Your sweetheart is essentially a student and a book-worm. All men with concentrative qualities like his sooner or later get absorbed in their studies and forget the little duties and attentions which you say you look for from the male sex. I would be the last one in the world to discourage you, Lillian, but I have to warn you that you will have to shut your eyes to many oddities in Edward's disposition. Though you love the higher and better things of life, and enjoy good books and music, still your nature is much more superficial than your boy friend's ever will be. I can see clearly why Edward "makes you sick." You seem to live on flattery and everything pertaining to praise and applause. Your sweetheart realizes your worth all right, but fails to come across with the necessary pat on the back, and consequently falls in your estimation. This is all foolishness, Lillian, and unless you are to act like a grown-up girl, you should quit thinking about getting married to this boy. There is no reason why you should not be happy in each other's companionship, but stop thinking that way about him.

be glad to hear what you can
Lawrence
would be proud of such a name sake
Annette

(Miss Annette M., Brooklyn, N. Y.) I am sure that you and your sweetheart are on the highway to happiness. You are a well-mated pair of young folk, and as such your matrimonial life ought to be comparatively happy. It appears you are both very sentimental and given to emotionalism. Lawrence is a typical Scotchman who has all the earmarks of a man who believes in the old adage that "wanton waste makes woeful want." You are not much different yourself, for you like full value for your money. In monetary matters you are one, but this cannot be said with as much certainty concerning your tempers. If you expect to keep the love-light burning brightly in your home, you will need to be far less opinionated than you are at the present moment. It's all right to have opinions of your own, for no woman could be called a real helpmeet who is only an echo of the man she marries. There is a limit, however, and I would advise you, Annette, to give Lawrence the benefit of the doubt sometimes—otherwise there is sure to be trouble before you are many months married! Apart from one or two minor discrepancies in tastes, I feel you are to be very happy in each other's company, long after the honeymoon is over.

professional stage and as
Maggie
I have been interested for a long time
Henry

(Miss Maggie S., La Salle, Ill.) Your two samples of handwritings are a study in contrasts. Henry is the sort of fellow who believes in hastening slowly. You can never

DID YOU KNOW---

LIGHT-HEARTED Norma, as she might well be termed by the way she "cuts up" all through her pictures, is not, in real life, the care-free, happy-go-lucky woman we see on the silver screen. On the contrary, her handwriting proclaims that she is rather sane and sober in all she does. Norma has adaptability plus. The sentimental side of her nature is a study. She is far removed from the gushing type of girl while consistently affectionate all the time. She takes her love-making in much the same way as she would the buying of an evening gown. The man, as well as the gown, has just to be "so." His mentality must measure up to her own. His mannerisms have to be of the manly sort. His tastes cannot be too cultured for her. Being a cultured woman herself, her companion has to be more than good-looking. Mental refinement is one of her strongest characteristics, with a gentle, steadfast affection making a good second in that vivacious personality of hers. Hers is a nature which would wear well and inspire increasing love and admiration.

Norma Shearer

THIS screen favorite does not believe in camouflage. As we see him on the screen, so is he in real life. Possessing all the temperament of the average artist—intuition, quick perception, artistic taste and dogged perseverance—Ronald is, first and last, a natural actor. Few of our picture stars have the analytical mind of this young man. His business ability also teaches him the true perspective of life. He might not be the best beloved hero on the screen, but he certainly is the most painstaking and conscientious worker in the studios. He never could be accused of up-stage mannerisms. He is of the modest type who would never think more highly of himself than he ought to think. As a lover, Ronald would always be very matter-of-fact. He has the courage of his convictions in this direction as well as in the more prosaic things of life. If in love with a woman, he would bring all his resources to his aid. A straight shooter both in love and war.

Ronald Colman

"rush" such a man. His reserved manner is bound to get on your nerves, as you confess in your letter. If I mistake not, he is rather subtle-minded, and not at all as frank and open as he ought to be with you. You, on the other hand, are generous and candid, with a great abhorrence of shady dealing. You also impress me as a girl who is tender-hearted and emotional. You lean to the mystical things in life, and are never more happy than when you are out in the open admiring nature, or indoors reading a good book. The coarser and more material things have no appeal to you whatever, and as a result I believe you would have little patience with Henry when he talks about his earnings in Wall Street. As to whether you two young folk would ever make a "go" of marriage, I hesitate to commit myself. Henry has all the earmarks of a good husband, and one who would be a conscientious provider for any woman, but that's as far as I would go. Sentimentally, he might be a disappointment. Love does not figure very much in his young life. Romance is like a foreign language to him, and means nothing as far as he is concerned. Under these circumstances a girl of your temperament would be all the better to think twice before you spoke once when it comes to giving your consent to marriage. Think this over, and don't be in any hurry for the marriage day to come. There's better fish in the sea than ever were caught, and this applies to men as well as fish!

to the extent of submitting my
Joan
be obnoxious to my taste
Russell

(Miss Joan L., Newport, R. I.) Your letter, which by the way was far too long, contained too many controversial points for me to discuss in this department. I shall write you privately, and try and answer as many as possible. In the meantime, I shall confine my remarks to one or two outstanding traits which stare me in the face when I look at your pen strokes. For example, your long loops, above and below the lines, bespeak a rather distinctive mentality. It is very obvious to me that you do all your own thinking, and seldom listen to the say-so of other people. But you are a conformist when it comes to style or fashion. You belong to the type who "copy" mannerisms, in speech and action. You do your darnedest to convince those around you that you are "somebody." Self-importance runs rampant in your nature, and an excessive amount of vanity permeates your whole disposition. When I look at Russell's handwriting, I am convinced that he is far too good for you. By this I do not mean to say that you are a girl with a doubtful character. Far from it, but what I do mean is your superficial outlook on life is cheap and tawdry compared to your sweetheart's. This boy friend of yours is far above the average in intellect and character. He is extremely conscientious and clean-cut, a young man who is out to make you happy, if at all possible. If I were you, Joan, I would try to adjust my mentality to his. Only by doing so can you hope to be happy with a man like Russell.

YOUR CAREER

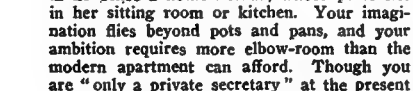
and she was very

(Miss Dora F., Rochester, N. Y.) You did not impress me very much by what you said about the six different positions you have held down in the last two years. I think you are too much of a rolling-stone ever to hope for much success in the business world. You revealed the secret of this unstability of character by the way your "t's" are crossed. Don't you think that a suggestion from me as to your right vocation would be almost futile seeing you have given so many the once-over already? If you promise to take my advice, and give yourself a chance to succeed I would not hesitate to tell you to tackle the job of social worker. I base my conclusion upon the fact that you are logical in your thinking, with the proper amount of sentiment in your make-up to sympathize with the person who is less fortunate than yourself. You are self-sacrificing and generous-hearted. Your judgment could be always relied upon, and as for sagacity, you have more than enough. Now all this is very fine, but the fact of you having all those God-given gifts is no guarantee that you are to make the best use of them. So

far you haven't, so what are you going to do about it? You have the ball at your foot, but are you going to kick it? No girl in Rochester has a better chance of doing a world of good for herself and her city than you have, Dora, so why don't you take a tumble to yourself and be a sensible girl before it is too late?

(Miss Ann B., Spokane, Wash.) Your handwriting gave me a pretty good idea of what you are heading for. You are the sort of girl who has very decided ideas of what she is going after. I am glad in a way that your objective is *not* marriage, as you informed me in that interesting letter of yours. I would be sorry to think that a girl with your business acumen should ever think of retiring from active service. You are far too valuable an asset to any organization. Leadership qualities are written all over your pen-strokes. I see a fine steady purpose running through the warp and woof of your nature. You are cut out for big things, Ann, and as a result I am certain you can accomplish anything you care to go after. You are in no sense a home-woman, whose pride lies in her sitting room or kitchen. Your imagination flies beyond pots and pans, and your ambition requires more elbow-room than the modern apartment can afford. Though you are "only a private secretary" at the present moment, as you inform me, this is only a stepping-stone to what you are coming into in the very near future. I cannot speak too highly of your inherent qualities. You have everything in your nature that makes for success, and I wish you the very best of luck.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS



(Miss Emma C., Springfield, Mass.) Your penmanship reveals to me a somewhat self-assertive mind. You impress me as being rather chesty, and inclined to carry your chin a little too high at times. You appear to be struggling against disappointment and depression. There is evidently something in your life which haunts you like a ghost, and as a result makes you very unhappy at times. I would call you a spiritually-minded girl, who is easily drawn to the supernatural things. Some people would call you gullible, and one who readily falls for sob-stories. Your likes and dislikes are likely to be very pronounced. When you once make up your mind, it would be a hard task for some one to get you to change it. This leads me to say that your will power is strong. You are also steadfast in your affections, and conscientious to a degree when honesty is involved. In addition to all this, you are particularly fortunate in possessing clear-cut ideas about your duties to God and man. If you were just a little more humble-minded, I would not hesitate to put you in Class A among the young women of to-day.

THIS COUPON AND A STAMPED ADDRESSED ENVELOPE MUST ACCOMPANY REQUEST FOR ANALYSIS

JOHN FRASER,
ALL-STORY MAGAZINE,
280 Broadway,
New York City.

This coupon is not good after May 31. A stamped addressed envelope must be inclosed when forwarding.

I enclose handwriting specimen for
—Service for Sweethearts.
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Heart-to-Heart

Tell Your Love Troubles to

AGNES
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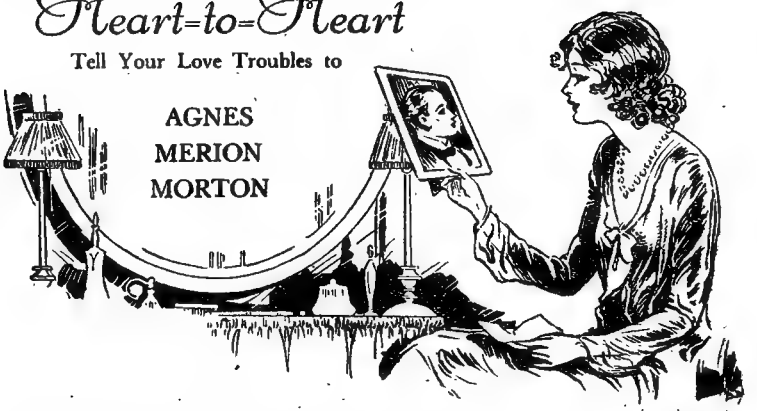

MRS. MORTON wants you to feel that she is a friend—some one to whom it is a comfort to tell your problems, who will advise and encourage you in your struggle for happiness, and who is always here to help. She is interested in you. Write to her freely, addressing your letter care All-Story Magazine, 280 Broadway, N. Y. C.

Every letter is confidential.

As Mrs. Morton receives so many letters, she cannot publish answers to all in the space allotted to her. Some, therefore, are answered by mail. Be sure to enclose a stamped, addressed envelope with your question.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I am a girl of twenty and live with my mother and stepfather. My mother was divorced the first time, and my own father sent me to school and promised to send me to college, but he has just got married again and finds he can't afford to send me. It was going to cost almost two thousand dollars a year. So now I stay home, and although it is a nice home I am not happy. My people don't think of a thing but money, money, money, and my mother won't let me go here and won't let me go there for fear I'll meet some one who isn't worth a million or two. The first thing she always wants to know is, "Are they wealthy?" and if the answer is no, they can't come to see me and I can't go out with them.

I want so much to try to earn my living, but mother won't hear of it, and now my stepfather is paying for my meals and my clothes, and I never have a cent of spending money, and I feel that he begrudges keeping me at all. There is a young man in love with me, and he is so good and kind, and although I'm not in love with him I'm thinking of marrying him. He treats me wonderfully, and has a good job, although it isn't good enough for mother. We live in an apartment where they announce every one who comes in, and two or three times she told the boy to tell him I wasn't home. I explained to him, and he said he was sorry for me and would take me away if I'd only say the word. What else can I do, Mrs. Morton? Don't you think it would solve all my difficulties? He is so good and sweet that I am sure I can learn to love him, and I am so tired of living like this. I just can't go on any longer.

BERNICE OF CHICAGO.

Bernice, I am sorry your life seems to be in such a tangle, but I can't advise you to try to get away from it by marrying a man you don't love. Many a girl has done that and lived to rue the day. You would only find you had exchanged one set of difficulties for another. Love rarely comes *after* marriage. No matter how kind and good this young man is, if he cannot make you care for him now it would be almost impossible afterward. It would not be fair to him, nor to yourself, Bernice, to marry without affection. In the first place, your lack of response might anger and hurt him so much that he would lose the "sweetness" which is his great

attraction now. Very few people are easy to live with; his faults would show up if you were together all the time, and it takes love to overlook faults—nothing else is big enough.

If you married a man you didn't love, there would be an empty space in your heart, and the mischievous little god would doubtless arrange for you to meet some one some day who would seem to fill it. Think how miserable you would be if you were tied to the wrong person, after you'd met the right one!

Your idea of going to work is much better, and I think you should stick to it. You have not enough to take up your mind; you have no money of your own; that is not the way for any girl to be happy. Perhaps your own father could manage to get you some business training, nothing like as expensive as college, if you decide definitely what it is you want to do. When you are independent you will be able to judge things much more clearly for yourself. You are young to marry, anyway, but not too young to make up your mind what you want to be and do in the world, and to prepare for it.

Don't marry for any but the one good reason, Bernice—that you love one man more than all the rest of the world put together. Use your head, yes, but your heart, too. I believe that if you stick it out things will come right for you. Have your plans all mapped out before you broach the subject to your mother again. Let her see that you mean it—that it is not just a foolish fancy. She may raise objections, but she would raise just as many objections, and worse ones, if you married a man she doesn't approve of. If she sees your heart is set on working, she will come round in time. I do hope you will learn to care for this boy, since he seems so very nice and congenial. But don't, don't marry without caring, for his sake and your own. There is no unhappiness so hard to bear as married unhappiness.

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I'm just going to be seventeen. About a year ago I was going to school and I met a young fellow I got very fond of. One afternoon he asked me would I go to a show, so I did. I kept on ditching school till one day the principal learned about it, and he told my mother and my mother took me out of school. I've been working in a store ever since. She did not allow me to go out with anybody, and I grew lonesome.

One day when I was on my way to the store I met him, and went out with him. My mother did not know about it. I went because I loved him and I knew he loved me. I always had to meet him on the street corner, which he did not like very well because he wanted to meet my parents and talk to them. But I feared to have him do so. One night he told me he had a plan to go to Canada, and he asked me to go with him, but I did not dare. So he went alone, and for a while he wrote letters to me, but then he stopped.

Now I was introduced to a fellow—my uncle brought him to the house—and he likes me, and I like him pretty well, but not the way I love the first one. He asked me in front of my mother would I marry him, and she immediately said yes. What shall I do? I cry nights, thinking of Artie, and wishing he would come back before it is too late. How I wish I could go out to dances and parties, and have a good time the way other girls do. Write and tell me, please, what you would do if you were me.

ANNA BELLE.

I think you are pretty young to be thinking about marriage yet a while, and I'm sure that no one, in this free country, can make you marry a man you don't want to marry, provided you have the spunk to face it out and say No! Don't let this young fellow get the idea that you will marry him. Tell him the truth. Remember that no matter how uncomfortable your people can make it for you at home, if you go against their wishes, it is nothing to how uncomfortable you would be if married to the wrong person—and it will not last nearly so long!

If I were in your place, I'd go to my mother and tell her I was sorry I'd been so foolish as to "ditch" school, and ask her if she wouldn't let me go back. You ought to get a good education, Anna Belle, if you ever want to get anywhere in the world, and have the right sort of people admire and respect you. Go back to school and learn all you can, for it will never come amiss. An education is one of the most valuable things in the world. Very often we do not appreciate this when we are young, but we bitterly regret, as we grow older, having failed to make the most of our opportunities. Whatever you learn now will help you every day of your life when you are older—help you to earn more money, help you to face the world, help you to be more worth while in it.

Go back to school, and leave the marriage question until it is time. Read this:

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I hope you will print this letter so that all of the ones like Coralie and her mother and father will read this and think twice before they make the same mistake. I have married a man who is a college graduate, and so are the rest of his family. Now, I have not had the opportunity to go more than to the eighth grade. He makes all kind of fun of me, not only at home, but in public, and hurts me more than he will ever know. He is always calling me a fool or a dummy, and when I plan to go to school again and learn something, he comes back with the answer he is going to take up something that will take

up all of our money. So I beg of you who have a high school or college education, if you marry some one who has not, try to help her or him to get it instead of making fun of them.

ONE WHO KNOWS.

You are absolutely right, that the thing for those who have had more opportunities to do is to help those who haven't, rather than to ridicule them for what is not in any way their fault. People who act in that way show their own ill breeding, and they aren't worth suffering for, but I know it hurts, especially when they are such close connections.

But I believe you can help yourself, somehow or other, to get a little money together and take one of those correspondence courses in English, if nothing more. They are not expensive, and they give a thorough training and explain things so clearly that the student cannot forget the *reason why* certain expressions are correct, and others aren't, and that makes it easier to use the correct ones naturally. You should listen to those who speak correctly, too, and try to talk the same way. But I'm afraid I can't advise you to copy their manners, if they are such as you describe! They show a lack of kindness of heart, of human sympathy, that is much more deplorable than any lack of schooling could ever be.

DEAR LADY:

I have always thought it foolish to tell your troubles to a stranger, but I'm going to be foolish just once because it will relieve my mind. I am a widow of thirty and have two children. My husband has been dead four years, and about two years ago I met a man whom I learned to think the world of. I still do, although we do not even speak to each other now.

Mrs. Morton, this man thought the world of me when he started to go with me. He told every one that he was going to marry me, even if I did have two children. I live in a town where a person's reputation is not worth a cent to the evil-minded inhabitants. They have run me down to the lowest notch, but I have managed to hold my head up because I have a clear conscience. Somehow, he could not stand all the talk and the jeers that were thrown at him because he was going to marry me "second-hand." He very soon became cool, and said he could not afford to get married because he had to help his folks. I knew he lied, but did not say anything—just let him believe that I felt sorry for him and believed him. Well, he never entirely gave me up, but he would always come down and never take me out any more where people could see us. So I told him that if he was ashamed to be seen with me, I was ashamed to have him come on the sly like that, and he could just take himself off.

Another man, an older man, who used to be our friend when my husband was living, began to come and see me about this time. I believe he was just sorry for me at first, but he says he loves me now, and has asked me to marry him. And then Stanley (the first one) got jealous—don't you think he has a nerve?—and went to him and raved, and said he would never give me up to him! Mr. M. is jealous of Stanley, too, but he tries not to show it, and sometimes he asks me, sort of wistful, if I can't get over Stanley and care for him.

Do you think I am spoiled for another man, Mrs. Morton? What is wrong? Of course, I have my children, and they are darlings, but a woman wants some one she can talk to and pal with, some one who will take care of her.

ZILLA.

Of course, you are not "spoiled" for another man—not for a man who truly loves you. Such a man would love your children for your sake, and want to help you make a home for them. Stanley seems to have the right sort of feeling, but not the courage to stand by his convictions. He must know what kind of woman you are—that the talk was unjust—and if he can't stick to you and be true to you, you will have to make up your mind that he isn't worthy of your affection and try your very best to root it out of your heart.

So long as you yourself know you are right, you will have to try not to mind what people say. I know it is hard to stand for all that bickering, but if people are so idle and empty-minded that they can do nothing but run down their neighbors, their good opinion isn't worth having, nor their talk worth listening to. Try to pity them. They have missed happiness themselves; they have no conception of the beautiful and worth-while things there are in the world; all they have to talk about is personalities.

You must have plenty to do to keep you busy, anyway, and work is the best cure for most troubles. I'm glad you have your children. They will be an endless source of interest and amusement to you, and to try to make good citizens of them is enough for any woman—it is something worth while, something to be proud of. About the other matter, you will have to keep a stiff upper lip. If Stanley is the man for you he will come back. And if he's not—well, you are fortunate to have found it out in time. Try to look at it that way, and hard as it may be now, you have the good sense and judgment to know it can't last forever. Some day you will be glad you lost him, for you will learn that he was not worth having. I'd like to do a little cheering for the older man, myself. Only I don't want you to marry any one else, just because you can, or to "show" people, or

for any but the one good reason. The one thing worse than not having the man you do want is having the man you don't. I hope it will all come out right some day, and I believe that whatever happens, you will feel that it was "right." And so long as you can look your children in the face, you will be a blessed woman and a happy mother.

DEAR WORKING GIRL:

I would like very much to have you for a friend. I am also a young widow; my dear daddy has been dead since January 2 of this year, and I am awfully lonesome. I have two sweet baby girls, the first one not yet two. Daddy called baby, who was four months old when he died, his little sunshine because she is full of smiles, and then she got sick and he worried so I believe that it made him move toward death faster. She had her ears pierced at three o'clock that morning, and daddy held her head, and at five he went to our Maker. You see, he was sick only about fifteen minutes. It was his heart. He had a growth under it and it stopped the blood circulation. I am eighteen and he had just passed thirty. He was well liked by every one and would do all he could to help them.

I believe I have said enough about myself and my troubles. Won't you please write and tell me about yourself? Have you any children? Write to me soon, as it seems that I'll go crazy from loneliness—you know how it is. Please tell your friends to write me.

CYNTHIA.

Working Girl, if you see this letter won't you answer it?

DEAR MRS. MORTON:

I would like you to advise me on the following problem:

About a year and a half ago I met one for whom I learned to care very much. I believed he liked me, too, but not as much as I cared for him. I haven't seen him now for about two months and sometimes I feel as though I shall go mad unless I see him again. When I say I haven't seen him I mean to talk to, or when he could help it. Of course, I meet him sometimes on the street.

When I first went out with him he treated me nicely, but the more I went out with him the more liberties he expected. I let him see I cared too much, I guess, and so he lost interest. I had a date with him one night and he never came, and hasn't been near me since. He is wearing my graduation pin and has my picture, but he would not give me his picture as he said he didn't believe in letting girls have his picture. He is a very good-looking and popular boy. I am wondering if he really thinks anything of me, or if he was just kidding me along, as it were. I feel I must see him again and would like to call him on the phone, but I can't think of any excuse for calling him.

My girl friend and I are planning to give a party very soon. Do you think it would be proper to invite him? I would feel terrible if he wouldn't come, or if he came and then took some one else home. I am insanely jealous and cannot bear to see him with another girl, although as far as I know he doesn't go with any one in particular, at the present time. I avoid going to dances or anywhere he might be because I am afraid he might act coldly toward me. But no matter what I do, I can't forget him. I am twenty-one years old and have never felt this way about any one before. Could you advise me what to do? I have no one to turn to, and would appreciate very much anything you can tell me. How can I arrange it to see him again?

AGNES OF MILWAUKEE.

Little namesake of mine, I am so terribly sorry that things have happened as they have with you. But if you really want me to help you, you must not ask "How can I see him again?" but "How can I keep from wanting to see him again?" Have you really tried to get over this affection, or do you keep encouraging it—dreaming and thinking about him all the time?

You see, Agnes, a woman's mystery is her greatest charm, and when she lets a young man see she is his for the asking he loses interest. The excitement of the chase is all gone. That's the way the male is made.

If I were in your place, I would act just as proud and cold toward him as he now acts toward you. Don't seek him out; don't give him the opportunity to rebuff you again. Pretend not to care. If you leave him in a little doubt about your own attitude it may arouse his interest again—it's the only way. Yet I don't want you to do it with that aim in view. I want you to try just as hard as you can to forget him.

Now as to the method. You probably will not believe me when I tell you that just *acting* brave and proud will help you to *be* brave and proud, but I have seen it work many times. Give yourself—and me—a chance. Try it and see! Get another "boy friend." Be standoffish with him. Keep him guessing. See if he doesn't respect you and want you all the more. And if the first one wants to come around again, don't be too eager to let him make a date. Have another engagement the first time he asks. And be perfectly friendly, but not at all affectionate the second. "Necking" too freely takes the bloom off.

Only I'm hoping, Agnes, that you'll soon learn not to care whether he comes or not. I do wish you happiness, and am sorry you are taking this experience too hard. I would not invite him to the party; I would try to fill my life with other things and other friends—friends who will not hurt you. He isn't worth what he's costing you.

many readers. I am twenty years of age, have coal-black hair, brown eyes, and indulge in all activities. Am about five feet five. I am sure that my letters will be far from boring, so won't you please all write to me? Everybody, young, old, short, tall, fat, skinny, I want to know you all!

BEVERLEY.

Hello, folks! Yes, I'm another girl wanting pen pals. To set your fears at rest, I am seventeen years old, five feet four, and weigh one hundred and twenty-three. I have auburn hair, big brown eyes, and a light complexion. Any one wanting to know more about me, please drop me a few lines, and I will gladly exchange snapshots as well as letters. So come on, any one, and write to me.

DYNAMITE.

P. S. Almost forgot—I love all sports; my favorites are swimming, dancing, and *horseback riding*.

From "Darkest Africa"

The other night some one kindly lent me an ALL-STORY. In glancing through it, I came across an advertisement styled "Lonely Readers—Make Friends by Mail." To be able to make entirely new friends in this way appealed to me. I live in the native territories about two hundred miles from town. The population here is about seven hundred, including the natives. The people here are likely to get stale quickly, and they keep to themselves a lot. I like girls—fairly romantic or tomboys, either type. I myself like dancing very much. I am also keen on music, jazz and classical both. I can play the piano and cornet fairly well, and am also keen on wireless. I do not know whether your advertisement applies to males, but hope so.

ROGER OF SOUTH AFRICA.

Back Again

Through the Lonesome Club I have a swell pen pal, and I am now trying to get some more. I sure would like to get just lots of pen pals, and would be so thankful to you for them. This is what I look like and like: I am five feet six inches tall, red-hair, fair complexion, blue eyes, weigh one hundred and forty-five, and am a football star and also a soda-jerker. I have a talent for music and I like water lots better than a fish does. Now who will be the first to find out who I am? And, also, who will be the first to find out how old I am? Boy, but you will be surprised to find out just how old I am. I answer quick.

BOOTS.

I hope you can find friends for me by the dozens. I am very lonely, so kindly print this letter soon. I would like to hear from people between seventeen and twenty-five. I have blond hair, blue eyes, and fair complexion. I love all outdoor sports besides dancing and everything a girl of seventeen could enjoy. Here's hoping I hear from every one who lives on this earth. I will be glad to exchange snapshots with everybody, so come on!

DINA OF ILLINOIS.

I am a constant reader of ALL-STORY and think it's wonderful. I am eighteen, five feet five, weigh one hundred and forty-five, and don't look fat at all. I have big brown eyes—people tell me they're beautiful—olive complexion and dark hair. I would like to hear from other readers—their age doesn't matter. I live in the city and I don't crave their amusements.

MARIE OF HARTFORD.

"Just Another Pal"

I'm just another girl who would love to have lots and lots of pen pals. I am twenty years old, have blond hair, blue eyes and weigh one hundred and thirty. I enjoy all kinds of sports, especially dancing. I promise to answer all letters and exchange snapshots, so won't all you girls get busy and write to me?

EDNA OF NEW YORK.

I am a soldier in the army in this wonderful sunny Hawaii, and would love to have lots of pen pals. There's always something new over here to write about, and I have lots of time to spare. My age is thirty, six feet one inch tall, weigh one hundred and sixty. Am a favorite of all kinds of sports, and that is something we have plenty of over here. I am light-complexioned and have sandy hair. Hoping I will soon have loads of mail,

SERGEANT B.

It has always been my ambition to travel, but circumstances always keep me home. I wish some one from far away would write and tell me all about their country. I am a school-teacher of twenty-five and away from home for four years. When I leave the school building I also leave behind my professional pose. I never dance, but I do like to attend opera, operettas, and sympony concerts. I do extensive reading and also like to attend all kinds of sport games, and am very fond of bowling.

KATHY OF CHICAGO.

I am just a home girl who would like to find a small space in your column if you can squeeze me in. I am twenty-one years of age and a brunette. I like a great many sports, such as dancing, skating, baseball, and others. Hoping I will receive a great many letters, all of which I will answer—will exchange photos also—and that I'll have oodles of luck,

LONESOME BLUE EYES.

Brother and Sister

We are just pining for pals. We are a brother and sister. Phil is twenty and is a junior in college. He has wavy brown hair and the bluest eyes I, his sister, have ever seen. He is scientifically inclined and is studying for a doctor. Elaine is sixteen and is a

senior in high school. I have brown hair (curly) and blue eyes. I intend to be a gym teacher. Please write to us, especially pals from the South, as we both intend to go to a Southern college. Don't forget to answer our S O S.

ELAINE AND PHIL.

Here's a challenge to all and any girl who cares to write to an adventure-seeking girl who is sixteen years of age and a junior at high. I am a brown-haired, brown-eyed girl and love outdoors, but dancing especially. I love boy friends and girl friends and will answer and exchange snapshots with any one. So come on, girls, all for one and one for all, get together and write to

ADVENTUROUS JANE.

I am a lonely girl of twenty-two. Have been twenty-two only a few days, so the novelty of my new age hasn't worn off yet. Have curly brown hair that is almost shoulder length, brown eyes, and an olive complexion. I weigh one hundred and ten and am five feet five in height. I love to dance, read and write letters. I pride myself on being broad-minded and that goes a long way in making friends. I was married a long time ago, but it didn't turn out right, and I'm trying to forget it all. Please, some of you, write to me and help me to forget. I'll try to write interesting letters and will exchange snapshots and post card views of my fair city. To the first five that I hear from I'll send souvenirs from Dixie. Please be nice to me—all of you.

MISSISSIPPI BABE.

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THE EDITORS,
ALL-STORY MAGAZINE,
280 Broadway, New York City.

Here is my opinion of the stories in this issue:

Bride of the Desert.....

The Right Proposal.....

Hawk's Mate .....

Flora's Kodak Knight.....

The Brave Deceiver.....

The Loyal Heart.....

A Kiss for Colleen.....

The Love Pretenders .....

Northland Love .....

My favorite authors are .....

Name .....

Address .....

(*Name and address may be omitted, if desired*)